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THE HUDSON REVIEW is published quarterly by The Hudson Review, Inc., 684 Park Avenue, New York, N. Y. 10021. It is a member of The Council of Literary Magazines, and is indexed in the Social Sciences and Humanities Index. Book reviews are indexed in Book Review Index, and poems in Index of American Periodical Verse.

Subscription $18.00 per year in U. S.; foreign including Canada $21.00. Single copy $5.00. Special rate for bulk orders. U. S. A. Newsstand Distribution by Eastern News Distributors, Inc., 1130 Cleveland Road, Sandusky, Ohio 44870. Library subscriptions in England: Periodicals Division, B. H. Blackwell Ltd., P. O. Box 40, Hythe Bridge Street, Oxford. Back issues and reprints of Volumes I—XXXVII available from AMS Press, Inc., 56 East 13th Street, New York, N. Y. 10003. Microfilms of Volumes I—XXXVII available from University Microfilms, Inc., 300 N. Zeeb Road, Ann Arbor, Mich. 48106. We handle directly all requests for permission to photocopy.

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Printed in the United States of America. Second Class postage paid at New York, N. Y. and at additional mailing offices. Registered U. S. Patent Office.

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Europe without Socialism?

SOMETHING NEW HAS HAPPENED. For the first time in memory, Europe—or rather free Europe west of the Iron Curtain—may be entering a period of political evolution where, as in the United States, socialism is not even an option.

Consider the signs. In 1981 a socialist government under President Mitterrand was elected in France, and on a socialist program. It promptly nationalized what remained of French private banks, and then stopped; and its last prime minister, Laurent Fabius, whose parents were rich antique-dealers in Paris, was widely accepted as an active and ardent friend of private enterprise. Shortly before its defeat in the general election of March 1986, his government had announced that it was inviting foreign capital into Renault, the state car firm; and the Chirac government, when it took office in that month, promptly announced a program of widespread privatization.

Some two years after Mitterrand's victory, again, Spain elected its first socialist government since the civil war of 1936-39. Its prime minister, Señor Gonzalez, instantly satisfied a worried delegation of businessmen that he had the friendliest of intentions towards private enterprise, and his government has since proposed to privatize the great state car-making firm of SEAT. In West Germany and Scandinavia, similarly, nobody expects the parties that call themselves socialist or social democratic to nationalize anything. In Britain, it is true, the Labour opposition to Mrs. Thatcher's government is still burdened with Clause 4 of its constitution, which calls for the "public ownership" of the means of production, distribution and exchange; but it is anybody's guess—even among its own worried and embarrassed leaders—how much of that commitment would have to be dishonored if Labour were ever again to see power. Its leadership has at least cleverly sidestepped an unequivocal undertaking to renationalize, and without compensation, everything recently privatized by Mrs. Thatcher, which may soon include telephones, airways and gas; and by now there are cautious hopes that even in the most conservative of European socialist parties there is a slow-dawning intuition that state monopoly may not, after all, favor the poor and the dispossessed.

All this is very striking. It parallels, at more than half a century's remove, the American rejection of socialism in the years before the first World War. That rejection was long ago the subject of a famous analysis by the German sociologist Werner Sombart, *Why Is There No Socialism in the United States?* (1906), contrasting turn-of-the-century America with the Kaiser's Germany. His analysis holds

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no water now, but the question is still a good one to ask: the more so because the United States, in its almost unique achievement of avoiding socialism in both its two great parties, has long since proved that industrialism can be taken to its limits without socialism raising its head as a serious proposal. Even if there were no other examples on earth to look at, that enormous example would destroy at a stroke the prophetic claims of 1840s Marxism that industrialism must inevitably and rapidly lead to class war, a workers' revolution and a socialist state. Indeed if Marx and Engels had been right, the United States would have been a socialist state long before Russia ever was; and Britain, being the first industrial society on earth, would have been socialist before either of them.

Prophetic doctrines, as we all know, do not need much oxygen in order to breathe; and, like those who believe in the Second Coming, socialists have proved remarkably resilient in the face of a total absence of favorable evidence for the inevitability of class war or the inevitable collapse of capitalism. All you need is faith. I once heard Norman Thomas address a public meeting in the Midwest in the 1950s, during Eisenhower's second presidency. He had been a socialist candidate for the White House, and hoped to be so again; and his talk was at once highly patriotic and highly pro-Soviet. He believed, that is, that Americans should work for an October Revolution of their own, and eloquently said so. But he never remotely addressed himself to the question why a workers' revolution had not happened already, in America or anywhere else in the advanced states of the industrial West; and when in the question-period I asked him why not, he merely evaded the issue. As with other religions and quasi-religions, Marxist prophecies do not have to be backed by evidence in order to be believed. Indeed they can be believed, and by intelligent men, in flat defiance of all the evidence that there is.

But evidence can slowly take its drip-effect, like water on stone, and by now the socialist parties of Western Europe are beginning to show the marks of a slow erosion in their dogmatic certainty. In office they have ceased to nationalize, in Spain they may even denationalize; and in their supporting chorus of intellectuals, doubts are now to be heard. London nowadays is full of new plays—usually in the state-subsidized National Theatre and the Royal Shakespeare Company, or in little theatres corresponding to off-Broadway in New York—about how socialism has failed to happen in spite of the heady promise of the Attlee government of 1945-51 or the great days of the New Left a generation later, and how sad it all is, and what went wrong? David Hare's *Map of the World* and David Edgar's *Maydays* are characteristic instances; the Royal Court Theatre, which is the chief radical stage in the British capital, is seldom without one for long. The atmosphere of these works might be described as a sort of autumnal Marxism, where the dead leaves of that strange

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Victorian quasi-religion are sifted over and nostalgically admired: rejected as prophecy, on the whole, but somehow ratified as moral assertion. Left was never wrong, so to speak, though it may have been occasionally mistaken. The epitaph of the New Left, if its own survivors are ever allowed to write it, will be "We Meant Well."

Important, then, to see that the job of epitaph-composition should not be left entirely to those who lie beneath the gravestones of history. It is nothing like as clear as the survivors of the New Left hope and believe that their intentions in and around 1968 were pure and honorable, though it is natural they should by now be experiencing attacks of anxiety about what history will some day say of them. It is still rare, after all, for a man of 1968 to confess the whole of what he once did or tried to do. Jean Lacouture, a notable French exception, has publicly admitted that during the Vietnam War he turned himself into "a spokesman for tyranny," and that one effect of the Communist conquest of Indochina was to turn Cambodia into a killing-field only mildly less efficient than Auschwitz. Those choices, for the Marxist intellectuals of those years, were not innocent. They were knowing and deliberate. The advocates of bloody revolution are ill equipped to claim that bloodshed was never what they wanted; and the lesser and still damaging claim that the bloodshed they once wanted was of a different kind and for different reasons is one they are understandably reluctant, in public at least, to make.

One epitaph that should not be composed for the New Left, however, is that it failed.

I believe it succeeded. It succeeded in enriching its leaders, and there is abundant evidence that its leadership never hoped or expected it would ever do more. Daniel Cohn-Bendit's fat job in the Italian film industry was the natural outcome of his histrionic role in Paris in the hectic May days of 1968: he was made for show business, and knew it, and the boulevards of Paris in those days proved it to the world. In Anglo-America, similarly, the surviving leaders of the student movement of those days have few personal reasons to feel disappointed men. If academic, they were commonly (though not universally) promoted; if writers and publicists, they made it rich. E.P. Thompson, the English Marxist historian, lives in a country house in Worcestershire complete with deer-park; Raymond Williams, during his years as a Cambridge professor, had two country houses. It may be said that all that is poor compensation for having failed to make a revolution, but that is surely a misapprehension. It is much more likely that they never intended to make one.

Acquainted as they were with life east of the Iron Curtain and in Cuba, the leaders of the New Left must always have known that existence under some Anglo-Saxon version of Castro or Brezhnev

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would be shabbier, by far, than the life they so richly enjoyed and intended to go on enjoying. Even at the height of the sixties, their personal conversation was always highly consumeristic: it was about homes, cars, hi-fi and foreign travel. More significantly, they never appointed, or even considered appointing, a leader or shadow-cabinet to rule. It was a notorious fact of May 1968 that the Paris demonstrators of those days offered no names to occupy posts like the Presidency of the Fifth French Republic, or its premiership, or any other ministerial title. The same could be said of the monster demonstration against the Vietnam War in Washington in 1967, or of demos outside the American embassy in London at much the same time. Nobody, to my recollection, ever remotely wanted to put Norman Mailer into the White House or E.P. Thompson into Ten Downing Street, or anyone like them.

That does not sound like a movement bent on power. Every Bolshevik in 1917 surely knew that Lenin was likely to be the ruler of Russia if power were seized, and that Trotsky would be among his right-hand men; every Cuban in 1957 that the success of the rising would mean Castro to the helm. It is of the nature of serious bids for power, whether constitutional or violent, that their leadership should be named and known. In that specific and essential sense of the term, the New Left had *no* political leadership, though it had street leaders; and it wanted none. It is surely plain, then, that in its heart of hearts it always knew it could not come to power: one might almost say, would not. It refused even to contemplate that possibility. From first to last it was a moral drama played out by those whose taste was for theatrical assertion: a dramatic event shaped like a tragedy, and by its own intention nothing more.

That is not a necessary truth of Marxism, and to close students of its scripture it is something like a necessary untruth. Soon after settling in London in 1849, Marx and his friends conspired to storm Queen Victoria's residence of Buckingham Palace, under the mistaken impression that it was a seat of government, and began stockpiling arms nearby in secret, though in the event the conspirators fell out among themselves and the attack was never launched; and in 1917, as everybody knows, the Bolsheviks stormed the Winter Palace in Petrograd. If any such act of power-seizure was ever seriously planned or contemplated by the New Left, one has yet to hear of it. Armed robbery and assassination, of course; but the terrorist attacks of the Baader-Meinhof group in West Germany and their successors, usually on US military installations there, could not have overthrown the Bonn government, however successful in execution, and it is impossible to believe that even the unrealism of the Red Army Faction could ever have supposed that they would. There is no serious evidence, then, that the New Left ever aspired to power; and rather convincing evidence, positive and negative alike, that it never did. It makes no sense to say that it failed to come to power if

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it did not even try. Power would have embarrassed it. Its protest was for those who love protest. From first to last, it was the political equivalent of the back-seat driver.

If Europe is suddenly without socialism, then, it is not because the New Left failed to bring it. They may even, in their extravagance of utterance, have helped in its demise. But its fading has left a curious atmosphere in the nations of the European Community: curious alike to visitors from east of the Iron Curtain, who understandably find Marxism a bore and are puzzled by the intellectual interest still shown by a free intelligentsia in a doctrine so stupefyingly tedious; and curious to American visitors, who can seldom understand the residual moral prestige of socialism in Europe when as a doctrine it can point to no prophecy fulfilled and no instance, anywhere on earth, of any practical success. Though a resident of the European Community and a teacher in a British university, I share both senses of puzzlement. The Americans and the Poles are right, and we are wrong. And such puzzlement is not new. More than half a century ago a British Liberal, Maynard Keynes, remarked that Marxian socialism

> must always remain a portent to the historians of opinion—how a doctrine so illogical and so dull can have exercised so powerful and enduring an influence over the minds of men and, through them, the events of history . . . : a dusty survival of a plan to meet the problems of fifty years ago, based on a misunderstanding of what some one said a hundred years ago.

But then Marxism is a scriptural religion, as Keynes knew; and like other scriptural religions, it can be believed even by those who have not read its scriptures. It is all a matter of aura; and even as late as the 1980s the word "socialism" retains in Europe, and in much of the Third World, a vague aura of reforming highmindedness. It is still exceptional to question its good intentions—though increasingly common, even in India and China, to question its good effects. Its claims to cure poverty, though unsupported by any practical evidence, are still felt to stand. Widely assailed as they are, they are still widely believed.

That is where the last ditch of socialism now is. And the tactics of that last-ditch stand, ideologically speaking, need to be examined.

Socialism was never, so its surviving supporters now assure us, anything more or less than a moral idea, and no economic proposal like nationalization was ever essential to it. Public ownership was only a technique or tactic of passing interest to the socialist mind, and one admittedly disappointing in its effects. Such, at least, is the word from the survivors, and their word is very bad history. Aston-

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ishing that the historians of the New Left, or its remnants, should ever have dared to lend themselves to it, with so much of their own contrary utterance on record and in print, or that they should ever have been allowed to get away with it. European socialism has never in human memory been based on the ideal of small-scale cooperation or the kibbutz. Robert Owen, the British pioneer who died in 1858, believed in something like that, but the truth is that his ideals had no future after his death anywhere in the socialist parties of Western Europe.

In 1879 Belfort Bax, an Englishman who had read Marx and visited Germany, wrote an essay called "Modern Socialism" where nationalization was the central demand. Under socialism, as he wrote, "*no* wealth could exist as capital apart from the state." Five years later, in *A Summary of the Principles of Socialism* (1884), which appeared a year after Marx's death in London, William Morris and H.M. Hyndman called for the state ownership of *all* the means of production, distribution and exchange. Morris was a friend of Friedrich Engels, and his nationalizing program became that of the Fabian Society which, as its 96th tract of 1896 openly proclaimed, was "State socialism absolutely." Nationalization was central.

A demand raised by Marx in the 1840s and ardently proposed by social-democratic as well as Communist parties in Europe for well over a hundred years down to the early 1980s cannot sensibly be called a passing trifle or a mere tactic or technique. It is an idea essential to the whole notion of socialism in action, and central to it for over a century. That it should have collapsed, then, and collapsed so suddenly, in the last few years, is an enormous advance in the political development of free Europe. It is as if a highly belated decision to follow the example of the United States had at last been taken, and almost silently. At least no public proclamations appear to have been made in the matter. And it has been taken in the culturally potent and influential lands of the European Community which, with the advent of Spain and Portugal, easily outnumber either the USSR or the US in population, outdoing either of them (what is more) in volume of world trade. That public ownership should so rapidly and effortlessly have ceased to be even an option in the European Community—that privatization should be pursued there even by governments which, like the Spanish, call themselves socialist—will look wonderful to future historians. It is as great as any intellectual revolution in our times. A liberal left appears to be replacing a socialist, though sometimes under confusing labels. Europeans, it is true, are not noticeably excited by the fact. But then they may be living too near it to have observed it at all.

The true wonder of a Europe without socialism may reveal itself only slowly, but when it does it may display something already familiar to citizens of the United States.

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Two effects, above all, may be foreseen, unless (contrary to all the signs) there is a reactionary revival of the Victorian socialist idea of the corporate state. One is that confident medium-term planning, free from all threat of state seizure, may become possible and even natural to European firms, unaffected by any likely change of government. And that, if it happens, could open the door to some striking economic growth.

The other effect is that it may cease in Europe to be morally discreditable to be rich, or to want to be rich. To any North Atlantic traveller, the moral credit (or discredit) of wealth has long been one of the larger differences in the contrasting ethos of America and Europe. The American view of wealth has long been that there is always more where that came from, that poverty is not caused by riches, that growth is a natural expectation of individual effort, and that wealth can be created, as God created the world in Genesis, out of nothing at all.

European socialism in its heyday was always based on a reverse assumption. It held that there was only so much wealth, that more for one meant less for another, and that (as in war-time Britain) fair shares demanded the state rationing of resources. Socialism was always a profoundly backward-looking idea, with little or no sense of the creative possibilities of economic growth. It imagined wealth to be a Zero Sum game, where more for one meant less for another; its characteristic technique was to ration; its model of social justice that of slicing a cake.

But now, and in increasing numbers, Europeans at last understand what few Americans have ever doubted: that there is no cake to slice. Wealth is not finite. The prosperity of one may make for the prosperity of another; and what America did in the last century, the European Community may choose to do in this and in the next. It is a thought to startle the sluggish and raise the idle from their beds.

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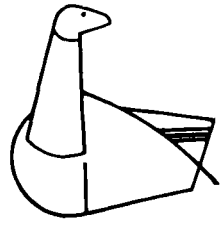

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DAVID EHRENFELD

The Lesson of the Tower

The Bible does not record how the inhabitants of Babel felt when they were forced to leave off building their tower and city. The account is terse: the language of Nimrod's people was confounded and they were scattered "abroad upon the face of all the earth." We are left to imagine, if we wish, the passions and the rationalizations, the confusion, denial, anger, despair, and above all the fear that must have accompanied the ruin of so great an enterprise and the overthrow of the accustomed purposes of daily living. That we can well imagine these feelings despite the vast gulf of time and culture that separates us from the people of Babel is because of the fundamental similarity of our predicaments. But we have the advantage if we will use it. We are already familiar with the story, and this may help us modify the outcome.

Since Challenger and Chernobyl, it is no longer reasonable to doubt that the world is entering a new phase of human civilization. The brief but compelling period of overwhelming faith in the promise and power of technology is drawing to a close, to be replaced by an indefinite time of retrenchment, reckoning, and pervasive uncertainty. At best, we will be sweeping up the debris of the age of unbridled technology for decades, perhaps for a longer period than the age, itself, endured.

Among the many parallels between these times and the days of Babel, is the most obvious one—the idea of challenging the heavens. The "conquest" of space has been the apotheosis of a massive technology funded directly and indirectly by citizens and used to further the aims of the state. Considering the quarter-century duration of the Space Age, its primacy in national and international affairs, and the way it has affected our lives, surprisingly little intelligent thought has been devoted to it. But that is now changing, and one of the first signs of this change is a remarkable and eye-opening

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book, . . . *The Heavens and the Earth*,[1] by Walter A. McDougall, a history professor at the University of California at Berkeley. Although McDougall and I differ over the lessons we draw from the history of space exploration, I cannot overstate my admiration for this profound, brilliant, and supremely balanced work. For those who wish to launch a probe into the ultimate meaning of Challenger, Vega, and Hotol—names too new to appear in McDougall's book—this is the place to start.

Considering what was to happen later, the beginning of the thrust into space was surprisingly conventional. It began with a dream. Inspired first by Jules Verne and later by H.G. Wells, the modern version of the dream (which in its origins goes back beyond Daedalus and his ill-fated son) was soon incorporated into the scientific consciousness. It found one of its earliest expressions in the 1883 diary of Konstantin Tsiolkovsky, *Free Space*, and in his paper, published in 1903, on the "Exploration of Cosmic Space with Reactive Devices"—the foundation of the principles of rocketry. From Tsiolkovsky, inventor of the multistage rocket, who died in 1935, the dream followed an erratic but unbroken course of development that recalls such names as Goddard, Kondratyuk, Korolev, and von Braun. In a quotation from Tsiolkovsky (1911) that McDougall uses to introduce Part I of his book, we are exposed to one theme, certainly the original theme of the exploration of space:

> If we can even now glimpse the infinite potentialities of man, then who can tell what we might expect in some thousands of years, with deeper understanding and knowledge.
>
> There is thus no end to the life, education, and improvement of mankind. Man will progress forever. And if this be so, he must surely achieve immortality.

That this achievement of immortality would be brought about in good part by the conquest of space, Tsiolkovsky and the others who shared his dream made absolutely clear.

Tsiolkovsky, Goddard, and the rest never had any real po-

[1] . . . THE HEAVENS AND THE EARTH, by *Walter A. McDougall*. Basic Books. $25.95; $11.95.

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litical power, as McDougall demonstrates. Sergei Korolev, who gave the Soviets the first ICBM as well as their greatest triumph, Sputnik, did much of his early work while a prisoner in gulag, along with the rest of his technical team. Even after the triumphs at Tyuratam, the remote Soviet rocket base in Kazakhstan—built by slave labor—Korolev was never entirely secure, never in his fifty-eight years free to follow the dream where it would lead. For there was, both in the Soviet Union and in the United States, another dream—"objective" is a better if uglier word. Tsiolkovsky's dream was the one that received the attention of the public relations specialists and the media, the one embodied in the phrase, "one small step for man, one giant leap for mankind." The other objective, we might call it the real one, was the one shared by the men in charge, Nikita Khrushchev, John F. Kennedy, Lyndon Johnson, and their successors. It was the objective behind what the Soviets and then everybody called the Scientific-Technical (S-T) Revolution. Lenin expressed it best, in 1919, in a quotation also cited by McDougall: "We must master the highest technology or be crushed." In other words, the function of a space program is to enhance the political and military standing of the state. It is the irreconcilable difference between the dream of Tsiolkovsky and the purposes of the S-T Revolution that explains what is now happening in space, and a good deal else besides.

Biblical commentators have long been fascinated by the tantalizingly brief account, in Genesis, of Nimrod, the "mighty hunter," ruler of Babel. Tradition has it that he was the first tyrant. Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch, a leader of nineteenth-century European Jewish orthodoxy, declared that Nimrod was the prototype of the dictator who uses a pious hypocrisy to increase his oppressive control over the people. Moreover, the obvious connections in the Babel story among tyranny, technology, unbridled pride and self-adulation, and urban centralization of power, have not been overlooked, especially by the modern critics. Again the parallel with the history of space exploration is inescapable. On the one hand is the pious statement of the dream: the drive to explore the unknown, the need to visit other worlds and perhaps find other life in the universe, the desire to unite humanity in a

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common goal of an essentially peaceful nature, the importance of discovering and developing new resources for the benefit of the suffering populations on earth, and, finally, the chance to fulfill ourselves and achieve our own unlimited potential. On the other hand we have the real reasons why space technology has been so lavishly funded by the major industrial powers: the desire to develop new methods of international spying, the importance of mastering the new symbols of power in the court of world public opinion, the need to bolster a sagging aviation industry, and the long-term goal of extending military and political hegemony through the use of new weapons systems in space. On the one hand a dream, on the other a grim and intensely practical objective, with little or nothing in common to relate them to each other.

Perhaps it might be argued that this is the way the world works, the way things get done, with a dream up front, in the limelight, and cigar-smoking power brokers making things happen behind the scenes. Reality is neither one nor the other, but an indefinable mixture of the two. This is how cathedrals and constitutions come into being, so the argument runs, and I have no quarrel with the general idea. But regardless of its applicability in some cases, I don't think it has much bearing on the age of space technology, where the dream, itself, was badly conceived, poorly developed, and inexpressibly shallow, and where the offstage reality has been from the beginning more cynical, more dangerous, more ruthless, and less connected to the dream than most people have thought possible. The dream I will consider later, after I take up the subject of images—first the offstage reality.

Much of McDougall's book, as any history of the space age would have to be, is preoccupied with the unseen motivations of the people and organizations that made it happen, both here and in the Soviet Union. In this account, a genuine, old-fashioned, and very convincing hero does emerge from the pages of . . . *The Heavens and the Earth*—President Dwight Eisenhower, who resisted the S-T Revolution and the call for a massive, federally funded space technology, who was fully aware of its many dangers, especially for U.S. democracy, and who had little choice but to start the space program anyway and to usher in the era of state science and technology that he distrusted and feared.

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Eisenhower, as McDougall portrays him, was wholeheartedly committed to the essentially conservative idea of getting the government out of the lives of its citizens. In this sense, Ike's concept of government was the opposite of that of the Soviet Union. His principal weapon was the budget. After the election that put Kennedy and Johnson in the White House—largely on the strength of public fears about Sputnik and the menace of Soviet ICBM's that did not yet exist—the lame duck President Eisenhower vetoed the multi-billion dollar Apollo moon program. McDougall writes:

> Supporters compared lunar exploration to the voyages of Columbus, but Ike insisted that he was "not about to hock his jewels."

Nor was the ex-general worried about falling behind in the weapons race. When questioned about "catching up" in space, he replied:

> "I am always a bit amazed about the business of catching up. What you want is enough. . . . A deterrent has no added power once it has become completely adequate."

And public relations did not have the same allure for him as for later presidents. McDougall states:

> Flashy public relations, observed Ike [in a *Saturday Evening Post* article in 1964], persuaded Americans that labels were somehow solutions: New Frontiers and Wars on Poverty. Such panaceas usually turned out to be new channels to siphon off power to the federal government. The space program had started with a step-by-step approach and was now blown out of all proportion by hysterical fanfare. These were the trends, and soon it would be too late. . . . One day historians would record that "here was where the U.S., like Rome, went wrong—here at the peak of its power and prosperity when it forgot those ideals which made it great."

The tragedy for Eisenhower was that he could not permit himself to heed his own warnings and follow his own intuitions. Not only was the political force of public opinion after Sputnik too great to resist, but, ironically, he himself had foreclosed any alternatives by deciding that Truman had been spending too much on the military and by opting for

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high technology nuclear deterrents, which at the time were cheaper than conventional armies and weapons. Ike had no choice but to ring up the curtain on the biggest technology performance of all. What followed was NASA, spy satellites, the moon, Soyuz, MIRV's, commercial satellites, Star Wars, and Challenger. McDougall looks back on the beginnings of it all for America:

> An "honest" space program might have been one single, coordinated effort run by the DoD and pursued in outspoken competition against an "inferior, flawed Communist rival." This would have been candid, but would also have been a mirror image of the Soviet posture. U.S. space institutions at least reflected the values of free, open, international inquiry and discovery for the elevation of the human spirit, even if deeds did not always measure up. The United States under Eisenhower traveled far on the road to technocracy, but it still sheltered the memory of goals loftier than those of the power state.

After Eisenhower, the memory soon faded and was replaced by rhetoric. If there were any scruples about technocracy under Kennedy, Johnson, and Nixon, they are not readily apparent to the historian. Stirred as he is by the more visible achievements of the space race, McDougall has no illusions about their cost, especially to the United States. The cost, as he describes it, was more than dollars, although that was massive enough. It was the substitution of soldiers by technicians and of military judgment by a defective systems analysis. It was the creation of a bloated research and development empire run by men like James Webb, of NASA, grandest of the postwar "Big Operators." It was the militarization of a civilian economy. It was the application of a technocratic and frontier mentality to nearly all areas of hitherto unaffected civilian life. It was the creation of an "act" so spectacular that it made other excitements in life seem boring and trivial by comparison and made itself impossible to follow with merely more of the same. It was the restructuring of academic science, indeed of all academic life, and the changing of the nature of the modern university from a house of learning to a place where money is extracted from the practice of technology. It was the growing reliance on think tanks for planning national strategy, and the introduction of terminolo-

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gy such as "flexible nuclear response" and "mutual assured destruction." It was, perhaps, the throwing away of "the last chance to halt the missile race at a primitive level." It was the perfection of the dangerous idea of technology as a magic wand, a cure for all problems. And it was the institutionalization and regularization of the practice of concealing reality by the use of a series of ever more polished and elaborate images.

Above all, the history of the American space effort since Eisenhower is a history of the manipulation of images—images used to conceal the real purposes of the people who were pushing us into space. The preoccupation with images began with Kennedy, who first perfected the substitution of symbols for reality that has increasingly characterized our national life and has reached its greatest development under our current actor-president. McDougall does not dwell on this theme, but as I examined his factual descriptions of the political process that resulted in the embracing of the Apollo moon program by the President and Congress, I recalled the image of the tall, boyish-looking President with his designer hairdo, his beautiful cosmopolitan wife, and the air of Camelot that surrounded them both. Kennedy was a public relations triumph, a master of images, and thoughts about images seem to have dominated a good part of his decision-making. When Jerome Wiesner's Ad Hoc Committee for Space advised him that he should dissociate himself from the Mercury program because of the risk of failure or death of an astronaut, he readily complied. McDougall speculates:

> The admonition [in the committee's report] that seemed to affect the new President the most was that concerning Mercury—exploding rockets, dead astronauts, lost races—that is, not that manned spaceflight was wasteful or misguided, but that it might be a public relations failure.

Nevertheless, he soon reversed himself on the issue of manned space flight and, before his assassination, on the decision to make an all-out effort to put men on the moon. The debates within the administration are carefully traced by McDougall and there is only one reasonable conclusion to draw from them: Kennedy, then Johnson and Nixon, sup-

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ported the race to the moon (as opposed to more low-key space efforts) for its public relations value. The international and national prestige that success would bring, and the disgrace that they assumed would come if we failed to compete, left them, they believed, no choice. The implications of this thinking are analyzed by McDougall:

> Throughout the century, Soviet leaders declared that the Western countries might be ahead for the moment but were run by and for monopolists who lived off imperialism foisted on others by their high technology. The USSR, on the other hand, was a people's state . . . and in any case would soon catch up. Now the United States was saying that the Soviet Union might be ahead for the moment but was run as a slave state in which resources could be mobilized to serve militaristic ambitions. The United States, on the other hand, was a free country . . . and in any case would soon catch up. In so saying and doing, American leaders bought the Communist line that technology was both a symbol of social superiority and the main agency for making one's own preferred image real.

There were as many reasons for the selling of space as there were government officials and agencies who promoted it. For James Webb, the head of NASA in its formative years, Apollo was a way of teaching us how "to organize the complex and the unusual," how to manage the "large aggregations of resources and power" that were, he felt, the key to American progress and survival. For Robert McNamara, Kennedy's Secretary of Defense, NASA and the space program were a chance to reorganize the military, subdue interservice rivalries, and pump new life into an aviation industry that was undergoing one of its periodic crises of income. Finally, the most obvious reason of all, the American public might not be ready to spend scores of billions of dollars and turn its society inside out to develop vast new military systems during peacetime, especially during détente. A State Department draft of 1961 states that: "Military space programs, even in research and preliminary planning stage, should be played down publicly." For many in government, space imagery was the means for concealing a primary military purpose of space technology that was not to be admitted. The Soviet space venture was entirely military in nature, an ugly truth that was

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concealed by simple denial and lying, made easier by the mantle of secrecy shrouding their whole operation. The American program was primarily military in nature, a fact that could only be concealed—in an open society—by hoopla: the "civilian" character of NASA, the manned moon landing, the cooperation with other nations' space efforts, the Space Shuttle, and the much-touted spinoff benefits of space technology.

Images fade and have to be retouched. Space imagery was no exception. It was impossible to hide all the colonels, majors, and captains who peopled NASA's flights. Moon shots became boring. The few foreign astronauts on U.S. flights hardly constituted meaningful international cooperation in space. The Space Shuttle, which carried heavy payloads into low orbits particularly suited for military missions but not useful for much else, was hard pressed to find any other scientific raison d'être. And C. West Churchman, a renowned systems analyst working on contract to NASA, showed that Apollo could not be justified on the basis of an economic cost–benefit analysis—military technology produces few civilian, commercial benefits. Who, then, was fooled? Not the Europeans or the Japanese, and certainly not the Russians. McDougall answers the questions:

> The only customers for the unrealistic rhetoric, the only ones who may have believed in it, were the American people themselves.

Unworkable as it was becoming, NASA was stuck with its imagery. After Vietnam and Love Canal it was faced with a citizenry that no longer took government at its word. Meanwhile, the Soviets had, early on, chosen not to try to put a cosmonaut on the moon. By this decision, they avoided the scientific-technical dead end of Apollo-style, manned lunar voyages, and escaped the limitations imposed on the Americans by their own public relations success. But America was committed to manned space flight of a particularly showy nature, which more often than not was an albatross around the neck of NASA. It was becoming harder and harder to amuse the American public.

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As NASA's budget increased in 1985 to more than $7 billion to accommodate the research demands of Star Wars, it trotted out a new gimmick. A teacher would be sent into space, an appropriate gesture in a country that has increasingly confounded education with entertainment. McDougall has nothing to say about Challenger—his book was published ten months before it went down. Even so, . . . *The Heavens and the Earth* gives us the understanding of American space images that lets us ask the right questions about the Challenger mission.

What are the right questions to ask about Challenger? They are certainly not the "how" questions, the questions about the mechanism of the explosion that have preoccupied the press since the day of the accident. The right questions have nothing to do with O rings, booster rockets, cold temperatures, or even mismanagement, although NASA, once it has undergone its purge and identified its scapegoats, will probably be happy to confine the inquiry to those terms. Actually, there is only one right question: Why was a schoolteacher sent up into space, and what was the purpose of what she was supposed to be doing there? According to *Life* magazine, two months before the event, her mission was "to demystify space travel." One way she would do this was by shaking up a plastic bag containing raisins and marshmallows, in "an experiment about gravity" which she was to perform on television from space. More mechanisms. Would she, I wonder, also have shown the students back on earth the experiments her military colleagues were doing in Challenger? Were they also to be working with raisins and marshmallows?

The question NASA cannot afford to have asked is, why send a teacher into space? Does a teacher teach better from a TV tube than from face-to-face contact with students? Is there something special that students can learn about from space? That one gets sick to one's stomach up there? They know that. That there is a magnificent view? They know that, too. That the human spirit is very special? They could learn that better, if they wished, closer at hand, by studying the writings of survivors of the Holocaust, or, on a more mundane level, by simply looking around them at the countless examples of bravery and humor of ordinary people coping with the stress of daily life in Space Age America.

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Why then did they send a teacher up there?—a brave, if somewhat misled, person who ought still to be alive and teaching here on earth. The answer can only be more image-polishing. People who watch, on television, a personable and dynamic teacher shaking raisins and marshmallows together in a bag while travelling inside a spaceship are not likely to ask questions such as: Why do we have a manned Space Shuttle in the first place, and what are the costs that all of us must bear?

The space imagery that prevails in the United States and to a lesser extent in Russia is only a caricature of the dream of Tsiolkovsky, a little like the Marx Brothers singing *Il Trovatore* (except that the Marx Brothers were never inept). This is unfortunate because the preoccupation of McDougall and other thoughtful critics with the imagery has served to make them withhold their criticism from the dream itself. McDougall never comes to grips with this in his book; busy with the imagery, he appears to accept the dream at face value, even to be dazzled by it. To be fair to him, it would have been a terrible book if it had been written by a person who couldn't thrill to the idea of space travel. Moreover, this is a pervasive and appealing fantasy for almost anyone who reads or watches television. Who has not been, at some point, a vicarious traveller in the glorious space voyages of Wells, of C.S. Lewis, of Asimov, of Heinlein, of Le Guin, or of the starship Enterprise? But the dream of Tsiolkovsky was never intended to be fiction, not even science fiction.

The dream of the mastery of space has become, if it wasn't before, inappropriate, self-destructive, nihilistic, and in the real sense of the term, anti-life. Dreams are a fundamental and necessary part of human nature, but this does not give us license to pursue them anywhere at any cost. Dreaming is a noble trait; particular dreams are not necessarily noble, especially in their execution. It is time we realized that aspiring to go to the top of Mt. Everest or to the bottom of the ocean, which are on this planet, have a different meaning and far different consequences than trying to get to the moon and Mars.

The fact that the dream of space travel can give pleasure is irrelevant; the point is that it was never very well thought out. For those artists who have used space travel as a way of con-

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veying some unrelated message or helping to explore some unrelated idea or adventure—Lewis and Le Guin are two such artists—this doesn't matter. For example, Hugh Lofting in his extraordinary Dr. Doolittle series has the doctor and his companions take a trip to the moon on the back of a giant moth. The exotic creatures and vegetation that he finds there are reminiscent of the exotic creatures and vegetation that he encounters on his terrestrial voyages. Why did Lofting send Dr. Doolittle to the moon? Probably because he had run out of devices such as floating islands, lost cities, and remote continents here on earth. But in reality, the good doctor would have a terrible time on the moon as it is, the moon that Armstrong stepped on.

Space fiction has no chance of success unless it is filled with replicas, facsimiles, or at least analogs of life as we know it here on our own planet. The two "constructors" who are the comic heroes of Stanislaw Lem's *Cyberiad* are mechanical devices, advanced cybernetic mechanisms, but anyone who didn't know this and picked a story from the book at random would probably assume they were humans. This is no problem for Lem, who is at heart a satirist of the human condition. Space fiction is filled with humanoids, pseudo-trees, freakish animals, and mythical microbes, because that is the sole way to make it interesting. The trouble only comes for those who take this sort of thing seriously.

The overwhelming reality of space is that it is, for us, for the foreseeable future and perhaps forever, utterly lifeless, bleak, and empty. Nor do we have the ability to make it otherwise, except on paper or on the television screen. We live in the world where we arose, completely suited by God, evolution, or both, to its conditions. Unless we abuse it terribly, it keeps us alive even if we forget about it or ignore it. When our created systems malfunction, as they always do sooner or later, the earth is still there to hold us and keep us while we tinker with our broken creations. In space, when the rockets misfire, when the O rings and backup O rings fail, when the captain loses his mind, or when the waste-purifying algae develop a disease, as they all must sooner or later, then the story is over. If we could create a truly complete life support system to sustain us in space, then we would have created the earth.

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Comparisons are often made between the dream of space and the dream of Columbus, two totally dissimilar instances. True, the dream of Columbus also failed; he never found a passage to the Orient. Yet it hardly mattered, for instead he found new, living continents and the wealth of the Indies. There is no new world in our part of space, nothing alive, and as for the wealth of the Indies, all we can do in space is spend it on satellites or destroy it with star wars.

For McDougall, who cannot bring himself to cast away the dream, the enemy is technocracy, not technology. At the end of his book he states his case in eloquent and measured terms:

> My instinct tells me that our science and technology, feeble as they are in controlling Nature, are so acute in studying it that they will soon reveal their limits. It is then that man must confess the mortality of his works, without turning on them or himself with contumely. It is then that the orthodox message is a sure guide: God made us, is disappointed in us, but loves us anyway, by which we are redeemed. Technology is our subcreation. We made it, we will be disappointed in it, but we must love it anyway, or it cannot be redeemed. . . . Somehow . . . we must try to compete for power without making power an end in itself, pursue knowledge without mistaking knowledge for truth, cultivate our subcreation yet know its fruits as only part of reality, and remember that for everything we gain there is something lost.

This is an intensely Christian message, and Original Sin looms large in it. We have sinned, but God will redeem us with His grace. Technology sins, and we must redeem it through something akin to grace. What is the grace that we mortals have to offer? A kind of collective and general forbearance and restraint, an exultation in our power combined with a knowledge of its limitations. What will bring this state about? McDougall doesn't exactly say; maybe it will be that same knowledge of our limitations.

The hope is a poignant one, but I will not trust my life or the life of my planet to such an inadequate expectation. First, technology is not as distinct and separate from us as we are from God—the analogy doesn't hold. More important, even if the parallel were good, Original Sin, one of the weakest parts of Christianity, is not the right model for the working out of

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earth's salvation. If we are inherently evil, what is the point of trying to be good? If technology is inherently evil, if we are bound to be "disappointed" in it, what is the point of our loving it anyway, and what good will that do if we have to live with it? How is that love to remain different from the technology-worship that McDougall describes so well and scorns?

I prefer the Jewish approach to sin as a guide for coping with the dangers posed by technology. There is no Original Sin: Adam and Eve's sin, although it created problems for us all, does not have to be repeated by anyone. Everyone is different. Some choose a good path, others a bad, most a mixture of the two. God's final judgment is on each total performance, and varies from case to case. Love is always available to anyone who manifests a willingness to turn and follow a better direction.

By analogy, all technology is not the same. Some is good, some is bad, much is mixed. We are under no compulsion to love a particular technology, and rejection of one technology does not imply rejection of another. There is no blanket grace for technology, nor should there be.

A similar approach can be found in Buddhism, which, like Judaism, is preoccupied with practical, earthly cares, not with Heaven and theological abstractions. This is no doubt why many of the most thoughtful and caring of the modern lovers of technology—Pirsig, Schumacher, and Pacey come to mind—have been inspired by Buddhism. Arnold Pacey, in *The Culture of Technology*,[2] writes:

> For anybody who thinks that sensitivity in the use of technology is important, even within a rationalist frame of reference, Buddhism can present some refreshingly challenging views. . . . There is . . . a tendency to think about human creativity more modestly, with less stress on virtuosity. . . . There is the suggestion that ideas such as charity, sharing and the meeting of basic needs should be taken much more seriously as goals in technology.

Pacey's book has examples of technologies that meet these criteria, as well as those, like space and weapons technology that

[2] Arnold Pacey, *The Culture of Technology* (Cambridge, Mass., 1983), pp. 117–118.

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fail. He insists, and I agree, that the fatalistic notion of the steamroller of "technological determinism" is a myth; history demonstrates that we have the freedom to pick and choose among technologies. And Pacey shows that in this picking and choosing, women have a special role to play—not as manipulated and exploited images or symbols, but as proven developers and pioneers of "user friendly" technologies in many parts of the world, especially some of those places we call "undeveloped."

As for space technology, it may well be beyond redemption. In . . . *The Heavens and the Earth*, I came across James Webb's quotation of Raymond Bauer, "whose study of the space program suggested that its effects 'may include changes in man's conceptions of himself and of God. . . .'" This is but an echo of Tsiolkovsky's words, mankind "must surely achieve immortality." Now, after Challenger (and after Chernobyl), I hope that fewer will take this sort of *chutzpah* seriously. Rather than rethink our ideas of God, we would do better to reconsider the nature and effects of our own creations. There is no need for us to follow the example of the citizens of Babel and bring our language, our "city," our technology down in ruins upon our heads. There is time to choose to stop building ill-starred towers to challenge the heavens. There is time to pause, and time to find other edifices of less height and greater grandeur upon which to lavish our creative powers.

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DAVID LAVERY

Departure of the Body Snatchers, or the Confessions of a Carbon Chauvinist

> Our frustration at the knowledge we are merely mortal is vastly intensified by the knowledge that we have created a technology which, seemingly omnipotent and immortal itself, has not extended our only allotted life span much beyond the biblical threescore years and ten. So we identify unconsciously with this technology which, being inanimate, cannot die. We find assurance that in its versatile devouring it has grown ever more powerful as it has leaped from feeding upon coal . . . to oil . . . to uranium. We find reason to hope that before the limited stores of uranium are gone, atomic or some still more magical power will have enabled immortal technology to leave this planet behind for limitless interplanetary homes, and we secretly nourish the hope that we shall be among the handful it brings with it. In this realm of omnipotent fantasy, in fact, mother earth is equivalent to all of reality, which is a drag and a hindrance to our yearnings for unfettered omnipotence, and we want to be rid of it.
>
> —Harold F. Searles, "Unconscious Processes in Relation to the Environmental Crisis"

> The greatest poverty is not to live
> In a physical world. . . .
>
> —Wallace Stevens, "Esthétique du Mal"

I

In Loren Eiseley's *The Invisible Pyramid*, the late naturalist's almost inhumanist meditation on the evolutionary meaning of space exploration, the history of man is compared, in a disconcerting analogy, to the growth of a slime mold colony. A slime mold, in order to reproduce, must scatter its spores from atop a "spore tower" which the whole growth and development of this strange, composite organism struggles to build, and in the end only a few spores survive to begin another colony after their dispersion, as they grow another tower, spread more spores. . . . Time may yet reveal, Eiseley suggests, that man's existence on Earth and his place in the

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natural order of things resemble on a vast scale the cycle of a slime mold. For man's space-age desire to explore and eventually colonize the cosmos may be, Eiseley hypothesizes, in answer to a primordial urge within us, and not merely the logical development of our tremendous scientific and technological achievements. "Perhaps," Eisely thought, "man has evolved as a creature whose centrifugal tendencies are intended to drive it as a blight is lifted and driven outward across the night." (The explanation of the source of this urge, Eiseley liked to think, may lie in the old theory of the Swedish chemist Svante Arrhenius that life on Earth originated from spores falling from outer space, the desire to launch into space thus being a longing to return home.)

But "to climb the fiery ladder that *the spore bearers* have used," to reach that point in our evolutionary, historical, and technological development when space travel even becomes a possibility, it has been necessary, Eiseley reminds, to first "consume the resources of a world," to become what Eiseley calls "world eaters," all in order to hurl only a few spore-individuals into the reaches of space, where, as is the case with the slime molds, only a handful will ever survive. History, Eiseley's whole book endeavors to show, is therefore an "invisible pyramid"—an all-consuming project, secretly enslaved to a monomaniacal yearning: to construct the means for leaving the planet Earth.

"I have said [civilization] is born like an animal," Eiseley ponders, "and so, in a sense, it is."

> But an animal is whole. The secret tides of its body balance and sustain it until death. They draw it to its destiny. The great cultures, by contrast, have no final homeostatic feedback like that of the organism. They appear to have no destiny unless it is that of the slime mold's destiny to spore and depart.

Such speculations on the fate of man lead Eiseley to serious consideration of "the possibility that we do not know the real nature of our kind. Perhaps *Homo sapiens*, the wise, is himself only a mechanism in a parasitic cycle, an instrument for the transference, ultimately, of a more invulnerable and heartless version of himself." "To what far creature, whether of metal or of flesh," man's departure into space may be the bridge, we do not, however, know. But, Eiseley observes,

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> if such a being is destined to come, there can be no assurance that it will spare a thought for the men who, in the human dawn, prepared its way. Man is part of that torrential living river, which, since the beginning, has instinctively known the value of dispersion. He will yearn therefore to spread beyond the planet he now threatens to devour. This thought persists and is growing. It is rooted in the psychology of man.

These words first appeared in 1970, and nothing in the last sixteen years has diminished the persistence and growth of the idea. It seems imperative then, as an essential prerequisite to comprehending the motive forces of human destiny in our time, to fathom that psychology.

II

> Should there be an oncoming self-destruction for the species, it is not unreasonable that unconscious warnings would exist. . . . In a landscape of pollution and disease when the roots themselves are poisoned, the healthy man might begin to prosper on the very conditions which once had been next to death itself—he could learn to live on the stimulations of the uprooted and the displaced. In morphological terms, it is as if the cancer becomes the continuation, as if life leaps a step and the anomaly acquires the art of reproduction.
>
> —Norman Mailer, *Of a Fire on the Moon*

In our science fictions, social-psychologist Philip Slater has observed, "leaders of alien civilizations . . . often have motives that seem hilariously trivial, but the joke is on us since those fantasies are simply projections of our own culture." The motives of the aliens in both film versions of *The Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (1956 and 1978) are hardly trivial of course, for they are world-conquerors on a vast and insidious scale. Still, Slater's observation rings true: these "Body Snatchers" *are* our projections; they *are* us. Their psychology *is* our psychology, for they are, as well, "world eaters" and "spore-bearers."

Originally a 1950s B-movie, directed by Don Siegel, which gained a cult following during the paranoid and conspiracy-obsessed sixties, *Body Snatchers* was remade—or rather "continued," as its writer and director (W.D. Richter and Philip Kaufman) have insisted—twenty-two years later. Like many remakes or continuations, it thus provides an interesting mirror, a kind of cinematic time-capsule, in which to observe ba-

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sic changes in America's mythic self-understanding as a culture.

In both films mysterious pods, produced by plants which grow out of spores from outer space, generate exact physical replicas of the human beings they are placed in contact with and, after the cloning process is completed, replace the original human with a newly-minted creature which, unlike the prototype, is devoid of all emotions, indeed all personality—is, in short, a pure automaton. These passionless new beings, we learn, are untroubled creatures, perfect conformists, governed by clear and distinct ideas, content with their lot in life; they are, in fact, interchangeable cells in a collective organism sweeping the planet and are thus intent on ferreting out and exposing as imposters any and all remaining humans so that the "absorption" (as they call it) may finally be complete. After absorption, each then becomes a True Believer in Body Snatching, proselytizing to the still reticent that there is no need to resist, for once the initial reactionary repugnance against total loss of individuality is overcome, contentment, it seems, is the only side-effect. (Like a neutron bomb, the invasion leaves all material possessions—and all life-styles—intact; in the second film, for example, Yuppies continue to be Yuppies, even after absorption.) Even the eccentric and outspoken poet of the 1978 version (Jack Bellicec, played by Jeff Goldblum), who early in the film protests vehemently against every cultural tendency toward collectivism, begins to spout the party line immediately after his own inevitable absorption. In a flat, unemotional, prosaic voice, he proclaims that it was after all silly to resist, and becomes a mere yes-man for the leader of the Body Snatchers, a man he had previously despised.

In both films a man named Bennell (played by Kevin McCarthy in the original and Donald Sutherland in the 1978 continuation) discovers that his community is being gradually taken over by the pods and their progeny, every trace of individualism and humanity in his fellow citizens being effaced by the mysterious conspiracy which he seeks to expose. In the first *Body Snatchers* (essentially an allegory of McCarthy-era terrors), the story's hero, a doctor, flees at the film's close from the small California town (Santa Mira) in which he has

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discovered the fiendish plot, only to learn that the aliens are expanding their endeavors to take over the Earth by exporting more pods by truck to the next town. This ending, however, proved too terrifying for the studio bosses, who demanded that a frame-tale be added in which Bennell manages to convince the police that the F.B.I. must be called in to investigate his seemingly paranoid claims.[1]

But in the 1978 version no such promise of a possible end to the spread of the invaders reassures us at the movie's close. Although the Donald Sutherland character, a health-inspector, is warned early-on of the coming invasion of his city (this time San Francisco) by no less than his namesake from the first film (who in an early scene appears running madly down a busy city street, fleeing the enemy, shouting hysterically "They're coming! They're coming!"—eventually colliding with Sutherland's car), he is unable to stop the Body Snatchers' advance. By the movie's end, in fact, Sutherland has, in a shock climax, been absorbed himself, thus leaving the audience with no center of sanity and absolutely no hope. In the film's last image—certainly one of the most terrifying in contemporary film—the camera takes us into the black hole of Sutherland's open, accusing mouth as he "squeals" in characteristic Body Snatcher fashion on a screaming Nancy Bellicec (Veronica Cartwright), the last of the unabsorbed, and then leaves us there as the shot becomes, in effect, a fade-to-black preceding the closing credits. (It says something, does it not, that end-of-the-century Americans can take the 1978 version's horrifying conclusion flat, while a less-despairing close unnerved our fifties counterparts.)

Before Sutherland meets his own demise, moreover, he discovers that the invasion has progressed since the fifties to include more than merely California (we hear of pods being exported to Seattle), more even than the United States; for at San Francisco harbor he finds a huge freighter loaded with pods about to be exported overseas. And there is no F.B.I. to

[1] In the novel (by Jack Finney) on which the two films were based, the invaders finally give up their plans and depart the Earth, "leaving a fierce and inhospitable planet" after being frustrated at every turn by the indefatigable resistance of human beings to their loss of freedom. It seems doubtful whether we can in the 1980s imagine ourselves resisting and overthrowing such an invasion.

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call to the rescue. When he had earlier tried to phone Washington to seek government help, he had only confirmed Jack Bellicec's post-Vietnam, post-Watergate suspicion that "those guys" (the F.B.I., the C.I.A.) were the first to be absorbed; for in Washington, Sutherland is already known as subversive, as an enemy of Body Snatching; he is already on the "master list."

The 1978 film makes visually apparent the origin of the world-conquerors (only vaguely alluded to in the original), and this constitutes another important development in the morphogenesis of the myth. For the film opens with a mysterious credit-sequence showing a decimated world on which plant-like organisms release spores that float away into space toward a distant, targeted Earth. (During the sequence, we actually see—in subjective camera—from the spores' point-of-view; we see the Earth, we enter the atmosphere—the first identifiable object in our view, interestingly enough, is the Trans-America Building[2]—and we plummet to Earth.) It is from these spores, we are given to understand, that the plants (which are shown in the process of gestation, captured in time-lapse photography) and the pods actually sprout.

The "Invasion of the Body Snatchers," then, is a dehiscence—an interplanetary dissemination of seeds from a doomed world by a "world-eating," "spore-bearing" form of life. For the real function of life—as the aliens' chief spokesman in the film, a Buscaliaesque (against fears of absorption he counsels hugging), psycho-babbling, best-selling psychologist, Dr. David Kibner (Leonard Nimoy) explains—is brute survival by any means possible. Nothing else matters: "We came here from a dying world. We adapt and we survive. The business of life is survival. . . ."[3]

[2] The Trans-America Building, Lewis Mumford has observed, was the first human edifice constructed in imitation of a rocket on a launching pad, and thus suggests architecture's anticipation of lift-off. The building appears again and again throughout the film—for which it serves as a kind of search-image. In one memorable shot, it stands between Bennell and Dr. David Kibner (the leader of the conspiracy), monumental, though in the depth of the frame, as Kibner seeks to reassure Bennell that there is no need to worry.

[3] The 1978 *Body Snatchers*, not surprisingly, contains many allusions to the environmental crisis. At one point, for example, Nancy Bellicec comments that we are sitting ducks for an invasion from outer space such as that of the Body Snatchers because we live in such a polluted environment already that we would never detect their

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Now, if the story of the Body Snatchers should be continued yet again, say in the year 2000 (allowing another twenty-two year interval for the plot to evolve, keeping up with man's changing, ever revisionary sense of his earthly destiny and cosmic calling), this paranoid tale will no doubt undergo another morphological twist. Having crossed the land and sea, having taken over the Earth, the aliens will doubtless extend their colonialist ambitions by loading pods on board a spaceship bound for another fresh, uneaten world—departing again from a desolate planet, this time our own, doomed precisely because its ruling form of life was already bound for the next not-yet-conquered world . . . Something about the lifestyle of Body Snatchers, it seems, is not ecologically sound; of necessity they must—in order to fuel their next leap and as an essential premise in a concept of destiny which is, in reality, a vast, evolutionary, self-fulfilling prophecy—abandon their ephemeral physical bodies and "consume the resources of a world."

But perhaps, I have come to think, in light of my suspicions about the behavior of contemporary man, *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (2000) will not be "only a movie." Perhaps it will be history. For by then, if our own planet-despoiling continues at its present pace, or a nuclear holocaust engulfs us, Earth itself may well become the desolate, no-longer-inhabitable planet from which an endless migration must commence. Perhaps, I have thought, *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* has succeeded in presciently chronicling, with true mythic power, the preliminary stages of man's own unearthing; perhaps on another world, in other, extraterrestrial movie houses, inhuman eyes watch similar paranoid tales, prophecies of interstellar invasion—of the coming of the spores of Earth.[4]

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presence. And Elizabeth Driscoll (Brooke Adams) concludes that the flowering plant she has brought home as an unwilling conspirator in the invasion must be what her plant-identification book calls a "grex": "that's when two different species cross-pollinate and produce a third, completely unique one. . . . Look how quickly it roots! 'Their characteristic rapid and widespread growth pattern was even observed in many of the large war-torn cities of Europe. Indeed, *some of these plants may thrive on devastated ground.*' " The Body Snatchers, we might say, are a "cancer [which] becomes the continuation," an "anomaly [which] acquires the art of reproduction." But they feel right at home on Earth, as the second film implies, "in a landscape of pollution and disease when the roots themselves are poisoned."

[4] Asked to respond with their thoughts on the first Moon landing, J.G. Ballard, a noted British science fiction writer, replied, "If I were a Martian I'd start running

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My own paranoia races ahead of rationality as I recall recent speculations, some by prominent scientists, which sound for all the world like the preparatory rationalizations for a future, disembodied dissemination. Has not Sir Francis Crick, in *Life Itself*, suggested that all life on Earth originated as the result of the "directed panspermia" of a distant, higher, ancient race? Has not Richard Dawkins, in *The Selfish Gene*, insisted that our genes are more real than we are, that we are merely their temporary carriers? And if Earth is only a temporary abode, a "nursery planet" as Timothy Leary is now fond of calling it, and man's body a mere "technological" instrument for the gene's survival (trust the DNA, Leary advises; it would not have trapped man on this dying world "without having figured *a way out*"), the handwriting on the walls seems plain.

Because I think these thoughts, I have come to feel like the McCarthy/Sutherland character of *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*, but in reverse. While their warning was an insistent "They're coming!" mine has instead become "They're going!" Please understand: I do not regret their departure; I would, in fact, welcome it if—as Wendell Berry has commented—these "technological romantics," these Spore-Bearers and Body Snatchers, would "depart absolutely from all that they propose to supersede, never to return." But because I deeply distrust their true motives, I fear that in their desire to fly *up* to the high frontier they may very well take Earth *down* with them. They are among us already, I fear, urging our excarnation, seeking to convince us that we should not be "trapped in old concepts" like the need for bodies and planetary homes. *I have seen them.*

III

> This afternoon, in bright sunlight, I saw a young woman waiting for a streetcar, accompanied by her body.
>
> —René Magritte

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now," and fellow novelist Robert Shaw suggested that the proper symbolic image to put on a plaque commemorating the emergence of man into space would be "something like a grabbing hand, with its fingers clawed into the Moon's soil."

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I would have recognized the species to which he belonged even if the occasion at which we clashed (as fellow panelists on a forum—held in a public library—on "Computers, Robots, and You") and his name tag (identifying him as a computer language expert at one of Huntsville, Alabama's major aerospace firms) had not already revealed it. The fierce abstraction of his eyes, something in his condescension to matter, his uneasy, careless inhabitation of his clothes tree/taxicab/body—all spoke, spoke loudly: "Computer-Jock." But really that was his subspecies. He was, more specifically, a Body Snatcher (*Homo faber* variety). He had already been absorbed.

An English professor with a vital interest in science and technology, a profound solicitude for the evolution and destiny of man, and a growing, disturbing ability to identify Body Snatchers in whatever disguise, I had been invited to participate in the gathering in order to give an overview of science fiction's portrayal of computers and robots. Having done so, moving rapidly in my alloted ten minutes from Karel Capek's *R.U.R.* to Kurt Vonnegut's *Player Piano*, Isaac Asimov's "rules of robotics," and *2001: A Space Odyssey*, I concluded my remarks by reading from N.A.S.A. scientist Robert Jastrow's paean to space exploration, exo-somatic evolution, and the glories of silicon at the close of his *The Enchanted Loom: Mind in the Universe*, a description of the true evolutionary destiny of man in the cosmos as he sees it. It was a passage the implications of which I, for one, found absolutely terrifying, for in it lay the philosophical groundwork for a kind of Body Snatching as prerequisite to man's everlasting, Faustian pursuit of knowledge:

> At last the human brain, ensconced in a computer, has been liberated from the weaknesses of mortal flesh. [Jastrow is here imagining man's future as a cosmic voyager.] Connected to cameras, instruments and engine controls, the brain sees, feels, and responds to stimuli. It is in control of its own destiny. The machine is its body; it is the machine's mind. The union of mind and machine has created a new form of existence, as well designed for life in the future as man is designed for life on the African savanna.
>
> It seems to me that this must be the mature form of intelligent life in the Universe. Housed in indestructible lattices of silicon,

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> and no longer constrained in the span of its years by the life and death cycle of a biological organism, such a kind of life could live forever. It would be the kind of life that could leave its parent planet to roam the space between the stars. Man as we know him will never make that trip, for the passage takes a million years. But the artificial brain, sealed within the protective hull of a star ship, and nourished by electricity collected from starlight, could last a million years or more. For a brain living in a computer, the voyage to another star would present no problems.

As expected, Jastrow's words had the ring of poetry and prophecy for many in the audience, those evidently weary of being "immature." There was no need to convince them that they—that man—should, in Jastrow's sense, be born again; that they should, excarnated, identify themselves with "immortal technology" in this "omnipotent fantasy" (Searles's words; see the epigraph to this essay).

Why, then, did I feel an unearthly terror? Why did Jastrow seem to me to be a rational madman, an apologist for Body Snatching? Why did such thinking—linking as it does excarnation and space exploration as if theirs were a marriage made in heaven—seem to me to demand a psycho-historical explanation, whereas for most it seemed well-nigh axiomatic, a given? (Why now? Why in the West? Why in America? I wanted to ask of history.)

And the Computer Jock was the first to answer. "I guess you're just a Carbon Chauvinist," he suggested, good-naturedly enough. He for one, he went on to explain, could not wait to have his consciousness translated permanently to "indestructible lattices of silicon." ("The business of life is survival. . . .") He for one could not believe I was so old-fashioned, such a stick-in-the-mud ("mutter," "matter," "mother") as to want to remain incarnated, earthy.

I was, of course, familiar with the tendency (beginning in the sixties) to call anyone trapped in old concepts (the supremacy of the male, for example) a "chauvinist." I recalled space-colonization guru Gerald K. O'Neill's description (in *The High Frontier*) of anyone unwilling to embark upon, or at least sanction, his ambitious plans as a "Planetary Chauvinist," troubled by "planetary hang-ups." I thought, too, of my own use of the term "species chauvinist" to describe man's reck-

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less, nature-be-damned, incestuous human-ism in a book I had written on Loren Eiseley and "the evolutionary imagination." But this phrase was one I had not yet heard in all the semantic dissemination of the concept,[5] though I immediately realized what its user meant by it. In the back of my mind I heard the android in the first "Star Trek" movie announcing "V'ger's" intention to exterminate the "*carbon-based infestation* of the Creator [Earth]." I heard, again, David Kibner (the psychologist) in the most recent *Body Snatchers* lecturing a reluctant-to-be-absorbed Matthew Bennell—still fighting for his reactionary, carbon-based, earthy, human values; still believing in the psychosomatic individuation which comes with bodies, lived bodies—that he must not be "trapped in old concepts," must not fear liberation from the "weaknesses of mortal flesh."

I turned to look at my accuser—and fellow carbon-based unit. But no, I thought: he's exo-somatic already, though his name was "Skip" and he was dressed in a leisure suit; he had every right to make such a charge, for he was, at least, no hypocrite. I accepted his allegation—I have since become proud of it—and counterattacked. "And you," I replied (incisively, I felt, but far too abstrusely for the audience that evening) "are merely a mouthpiece for René Descartes, his dummy, a Cartesian Body Snatcher." My wit fell on deaf ears then. Perhaps, like the already absorbed in the films—like Sutherland in the second one's last image, I should have countered not with a recondite intellectual barb but by leaping to my feet, pushing away my podium, and exposing my adversary with a pointed, accusing finger and moan-like scream of discovery, announcing to all the presence of an alien in their midst. But who, I wondered, was the alien now?

Though I failed then to decry the invaders' presence, I ask that you at least hear me out as I try to explain what I meant.

[5] I have only recently tracked down what may be the first use of the term "carbon chauvinism." When the *Oxford English Dictionary* one day includes it, it should attribute its creation to Carl Sagan, who, in *The Cosmic Connection*, used it to refer to the misconception that "biological systems elsewhere in the universe will be constructed out of carbon compounds, as is life on this planet." I do not know if my accuser was familiar with Sagan's term, but clearly he meant something very different from Sagan's usage. For he intended the phrase to mean the reluctance to envision an other-than-carbon-based form for present-day man.

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In so doing, I hope to make a full disclosure—the Confessions of a Carbon Chauvinist, if you will. Not merely autobiographical, however, these confessions are intended as a psychohistorical and philosophical meditation on the paradoxes of man's embodiment, his "supreme difficulty" (as Pascal observed), and his growing unwillingness now any longer to endure it.

IV

> Man is to himself the greatest prodigy in nature, for he cannot conceive what body is, and still less what mind is, and least of all how a body can be joined to a mind. This is *his supreme difficulty*, and yet it is his very being. The way in which minds are attached to bodies is beyond man's understanding, and yet this is what man is.
>
> —Blaise Pascal, *Pensées*

I had called Skip "Cartesian," ineffectually but accurately, for René Descartes—the unanimously celebrated "father of modern philosophy"—was as well the great progenitor of all such Body Snatchers. After all, at the heart of the famed Cartesian method (and thus at the heart of modernism) we find a strategic distrust of the body and the senses, a systematic doubt of common sense designed to extricate man's precious mind from all those false, body-dependent beliefs—like the geocentric picture of the cosmos—which had occluded for centuries the correct, objective, scientific Truth. In the wake of that Copernican Revolution in thought which had generated a new and powerful skepticism about earthly truth and sent man off on a still-in-progress quest for an "Archimedean point" (the phrase is Hannah Arendt's) from which to observe all mundane things with the detachment of a godlike, extraterrestrial being, Descartes had sought to build a new edifice of knowledge on a firm bedrock of indubitable ideas. And the "school of suspicion" (Nietzsche) to which his philosophy gave rise in turn educated a new kind of man, *Homo faber*, man the maker, distrustful of all that was not of his own making, an inhabitant of an increasingly mechanical natural world (for in Descartes' thought all that was merely matter was merely mechanical).

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Man, thought Descartes, must make himself immune to the seductions of the "evil genius" of the world, and the price (readily paid) for this immunization was, he knew, denial of the body, as he explains in the following passage from the *Meditations*, a concise outline of his method:

> I will suppose not that God, who is most good and the fountain of truth, but rather that some evil genius, at once very powerful and cunning, has bent all his efforts to deceive me. I will suppose heaven, air, earth, colors, shapes, sounds and everything external are nothing but the delusions of dreams that he has contrived to lure me into believing. *I will consider myself not to have hands, eyes, flesh, blood, or any senses, but as falsely thinking myself to have all these things.* I will remain obstinately attached to this point of view, and thus, if indeed it is not in my power to know anything of the truth, still, in virtue of a power I certainly do have, I will resolutely guard against assenting to falsities and against whatever this deceiver can employ to trick me. (my emphasis)

Descartes knew very well, of course, that he had a body, a body which impregnated a maid, liked to stay in bed until very late in the morning (so that he might "think," he explained, rationalizing), and whose prematurely greying hair brought him to dream vainly of inventing a corrective—a seventeenth-century "Grecian Formula." But it had become methodologically expedient for him to imagine that his *res cogitans* (thinking substance) was more real, more primordial, because only it could withstand the temptations of the evil genius.

But Descartes' philosophical motives for adopting such a method may have been a smokescreen, intended to obscure his deeper, psychological ones. As the psychoanalyst Karl Stern has pointed out in his study of the modern psyche, *The Flight from Woman*, the French word *décu*, which Descartes uses to describe the "deception" by which material things mislead us, implies as well "disappointment." Cartesianism, Stern suggests, thus represents—when understood as a psychohistorical phenomenon—a particular kind of psychic stance before the things of the world: "if we encountered Cartesianism . . . as a mode of everyday experience of an 'ordinary man,' merely *in its psychology*, as it were—we would find that the ideal of the *cogito* . . . means denial, a defense against the

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flesh because the flesh is synonymous with anguish; and the clean fission between mind and body is an isolation, a setting-apart and rendering innocuous of all that spells dread." Descartes' method, the seed crystal of all modern rationalism, thus makes manifest an inability to "accommodate" (in Piaget's sense[6]) to man's "supreme difficulty." It is not just the passion for clear and distinct ideas, but a form of cognitive dissonance: an essential repugnance to the ambiguities of embodiment, a dread of the weaknesses of mortal flesh, has been given philosophical respectability and an historical destiny. (For it is characteristic of the modern, as Stern reminds us, that "methods become mentalities.") No wonder then that when the great German romantic Goethe first learned of the Cartesian stance in his youth, it seemed to him and his classmates "so grey, monstrous and death-like that we could hardly stand it; we shuddered as though facing a ghost." For man in a Cartesian world has indeed come to seem, in Gilbert Ryle's famous phrase, a "ghost haunting a machine," and thus an easy target for Body Snatching.

Despite its lip service to cold rationality and clarity, Descartes' thought might also be described (as Paul Zweig has suggested in *The Heresy of Self-Love*) as essentially "Gnostic," and this too has contributed mightily to its unconscious legacy to the modern world. Those world-denying heretics of the early Christian era, in their insistence that the Earth was *beneath* them, their conviction that they were in reality autochthons of another world and thus responsible only to a "higher" calling and not to earthly limitations, resemble nothing so much as present-day "space boosters"—and like them, Descartes, at once the inheritor of the fundamental Gnostic predisposition and the conduit for that outlook's later propagation in those who, albeit unconsciously, now adopt a similar

[6] According to Jean Piaget, human adaptation to terrestrial life—"the continuous process of using the environment to learn, and learning to the environment"—moves by "accommodation" and "assimilation." In accommodation, a child learns to "give in" to the things of the world, accepting and molding himself and his behavior to its textures, its contours, its temperatures, colors, shapes, hardness or softness, and size, because he must if he is to live *in* the world and not *against* it. Assimilation, on the other hand, constitutes the fitting of new information into preconceived ideas about the world. Piaget believed that the interaction of these two processes results in the adult ability to think.

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posture, simply had no trust in anything earthly. "The Gnostic," Zweig notes, "felt that he had been thrown into a desert" when born into the mundane world. "But he was not entirely lost, for he could retreat into his mind, to a point he called the 'apex' of his soul. . . . Persecuted by the world, the Gnostic found refuge in his 'spirit.' " The similarity to Descartes is obvious. "If we substitute Descartes' *malin génie* [evil genius] for the Gnostic Demiurge [the pretender deity of Gnostic theology who governs unjustly all things of the lower world], we find," Zweig concludes, "that the *Meditations* propose an analogous situation. On the one hand there is the persecuting God who governs over a world of deceit, on the other the individual who discovers in his own thought a source of inalienable freedom."

Not surprisingly, as Zweig further notes, "The 'I' of the *Meditations*," the persona revealed by the text, "casts no shadow," for to cast a shadow one needs a body, and Descartes seems reluctant to have one. Recall, if you will, the scene in the 1978 *Body Snatchers* in which Elizabeth Driscoll, hoping for reconciliation, tries to throw her arms around her lover Jeffrey, the Yuppie, space-cadet dentist who is the first individual in the film we actually know to have been absorbed. Already suspicious of his behavior, Elizabeth recoils immediately, as if she had touched something not human disguised as human, as if her own body were tacitly repelled by the alienation of the "other." I can imagine feeling a similar repugnance to the physical presence of René Descartes, could I somehow be transported back into his time; I know I felt a comparable antipathy, a psychosomatic chill, in the presence of Skip. For Carbon Chauvinists, I like to think, the response is still instinctual, though we live now in the midst of evolutionary, gnostic changes in man's being-in-the-world that could well make such abhorrence vestigial and doom us to extinction.

I am fairly certain that the Body Snatchers are not yet spreading their pods among us; they do not yet conduct their conspiracy with megaphones on street corners. But they are spreading their ideas, these disciples of Descartes, trying to convince us, like the converts in the two films, that there is

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nothing to fear in surrendering our bodies for absorption, seeking to assure us that we no longer need to show any real, long-term care for these heavy, burdensome, demanding vehicles of mind, acclimating us to the prospect of shedding our flesh when the time for final metamorphosis comes.

V

> It is not humility that animates the new cosmological jargon but bravado. . . . Humanity is abandoning the idea that the universe operates by ironclad truths because it no longer feels the need to be constrained by such fetters. Nature is being made anew, this time by human beings. We no longer feel ourselves to be guests in someone else's home and therefore obliged to make our behavior conform with a set of pre-existing cosmic rules. It is our creation now. We make the rules. We establish the parameters of reality. We create the world, and because we do, we no longer feel beholden to outside forces. We no longer have to justify our behavior, for we are now the architects of the universe. We are responsible to nothing outside ourselves, for we are the kingdom, the power, and the glory for ever and ever.
>
> —Jeremy Rifkin, *Algeny*

In *Up-Wingers*, an utterly insane treatise on technological engineering and the "extra-terrestrial imperative" (the phrase is Krafft Ehricke's), the Iranian-born futurist F.M. Esfandiary insists that the only solution to all our pressing earthly problems is to embrace a cosmic alternative to our current political viewpoints: what he calls "the up-coming Up." He seeks to lay out a blueprint for a totally open-ended, "cosmicalized" future in which man transcends not only the old bifurcation into left- and right-wing thinking but resolves as well the old dilemma of mind-body dualism (a dualism Descartes locked into place for the modern age) through a vanquishing of the physical and material in which man overcomes the need for (among other things) mothers, families, children, the seasons, planets, suffering of any kind, bodily functions, bodies themselves, and, of course, death—as he seeks to colonize "All-Time and All-Space." Esfandiary, unmistakably Cartesian in outlook and, like his precursor, a thinly disguised Gnostic, is openly, proudly the exemplar of the very cosmic egotism Rifkin has described, promulgating in an almost *reductio ad absurdum* manner the incredible *hubris* on which *Algeny* seeks to

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blow the whistle. *Up-Wingers* is a naked, unequivocal tract to Body Snatching.

We have no freedom if we die, Esfandiary insists; thus the body must be entirely redesigned—this time according to *our* specifications: "The more we remake our bodies the more human we will grow. We have been prehuman." ("Eating drinking defecating reproducing sleeping walking dying—all these are prehuman," he proclaims, renouncing punctuation too as reactionary.) Because he trusts the "cumulative wisdom [sic] of humans far more than the slow arbitrary workings of evolution," Esfandiary has nothing but disdain for the body we have inherited and for all its functions, and unlike his intellectual forebear Descartes, he does not even attempt to mask his disgust in philosophical language. Just as the Body Snatchers themselves worked in secret early on in both films, spreading their blight clandestinely until increasing numbers allowed them to go public with their conspiracy, their historical advocates, too, once spoke only in hushed, subdued tones and in carefully reasoned, scientific, cautious voices. But their attitudes have become so widely disseminated that the pretense can now be dropped, and they can come out of the closet—as Esfandiary has done—about their actual Gnostic loathing for the physical and the earthly, announcing openly their true cosmic motives. Here is a sampling.

> The animal-human organism is structurally a robot. A rigid robot manipulated by its pre-determined biology and environment.
>
> What is more robot-like than having at regular intervals to inhale and exhale to eat drink urinate evacuate sleep? All these mechanical functions are programmed into me. I have nothing to say about them. They are beyond my control.
>
> If I stopped breathing for only a few minutes—a few quick nothing minutes—that's it. If I don't eat or drink or sleep at regular intervals my body begins to flounder my mind begins to go fuzzy. Last night in the middle of a deep merciful sleep I suddenly jumped up robot-like and rushed to the bathroom. There I was in the middle of sleep half-conscious half-alive holding my thing.
>
> Is there anything more programmed more manipulated than all this?

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To Esfandiary, in his apparent "frustration at the knowledge [he is] merely mortal" (Searles), the human body is an utterly loathsome thing, beneath contempt: a "fire hazard heavily polluted poorly ventilated badly insulated and handicapped with countless other structural defects. . . ." "*To hell with this natural body* . . ." he screams, seemingly unafraid he might be judged insane by his contemporaries; convinced, it would seem, that the future at least will find him to be a prophet. In dark black print he proudly shouts his longing for excarnation: "The body has been our greatest hangup. Our most serious obstacle to a higher evolution." We must escape it, he proclaims again and again, and we must conquer death; for only then will we be free.

And this freedom will come only through "up-winging," only by escaping the "drag and hindrance" (Searles) of the Earth. "The world is Satan, and Satan is the world," Martin Luther concluded at the beginning of the modern age, helping to usher in a "worldly asceticism" (Max Weber) which, according to many critics, contributed substantially to contemporary desecration of the "evil genius" of the natural world. Now, in the otherworldly, extraterrestrial asceticism of an Esfandiary, the world and all things physical have metamorphosed into a modern equivalent of the Satanic (at which Esfandiary throws his inkwell): have come to be seen, in his eyes, as an evolutionary cul-de-sac, an "evil" impediment to our cosmic progress toward immortality.

Psychiatrist Herbert Plügge, in an essay on "Man and His Body," explains that for his dying patients the "bodily live" (the body experienced as instrumental to and inseparable from all experience, the very substance of our being-in-the-world) is transformed by the encounter with death into the "bodily as physical" (the body experienced only as an opposition, as a burden and a nuisance, as mere vulnerable flesh). With this transformation comes grave "discomfort and malaise," for the body begins to take on the "character of husk": "the shabbiness of an old worn out suit which no longer fits: the suit is no longer really 'lived.' It droops in folds, wrinkled, devoid of any actual connection with us as if hung on a clothes tree." An inevitable "negligence and indifference" to the body's appearance is the result, Plügge explains, for

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"what no longer belongs to me . . . no longer requires care."

Clearly, Esfandiary's experience of the body—which he assumes to be universal rather than psychotic—is comparable to that of the dying as described by Plügge. But he is not himself dying, we must remind ourselves, only terribly aware of his own mortality and anxious to distance himself from all that might bring anguish; and it is the species-body, not just his particular body, which he advises us no longer to care for, cheerleading us to drop our husks in preparation for our own "omnipotent fantasy" of cosmicalization.

Is it not revealing that the exploration and/or colonization of space is increasingly envisioned by its advocates as an essential step in the extrication of man from his woefully mortal body? (The notion is hardly original with Esfandiary; it can be found in one form or another in the writings of such space-boosters as Konstantin Tsiolkovsky, Freeman Dyson, Arthur C. Clarke, Timothy Leary, Gerald K. O'Neill, and T. A. Heppenheimer; it is so common, in fact, that the psychological and philosophical basis for the equation has until now gone largely unexamined.) Through all of human history we have projected our fantasies of disembodied, afterlife immortality into the heavens. Do we now fantasize that occupying in fact that "higher" realm will miraculosuly grant us a living, technologized immortality once we are rid of the gravity, the cares, of the human condition on Earth?

It is in preparation for this "up-coming," Gnostic, higher life that we are trying out the dropping of the body now, first ideally, then, with technological magic, in "reality," cleansing ourselves in advance for that destiny we have long foreseen in our own self-fulfilling religious prophecies. We may be witnessing here a displacement of essentially religious values similar in kind and in scope to (perhaps even a continuation of?) the one Max Weber analyzed, in which the "protestant ethic" was rolled-over into "building the tremendous cosmos of the modern economic order" (Weber). But there is a much more basic, and more earthy, way of understanding the rationalizations and behavior of Body Snatchers. Body Snatchers, I would like to suggest, are simply "anal"; and so too is man's whole project to be freed from the body and unearth himself, from Descartes to Esfandiary.

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VI

> To say someone is "anal" means that someone is trying extra-hard to protect himself against the accidents of life and the danger of death, trying to use the symbols of culture as a sure means of triumph over natural mystery, trying to pass himself off as anything but an animal.
>
> —Ernest Becker, *The Denial of Death*

Why is it that the chronically malfunctioning toilet on American Space Shuttle missions has caused something like metaphysical embarrassment? (On one recent flight which carried experimental mammals, the air inside the Shuttle had reportedly turned "brownish" from undisposed excrement, both human and animal!) Is it not to escape precisely this sort of unpleasantness that we are heading for the stars? (Imagine the reaction of an Esfandiary—a man "grossed out" by the necessity of relieving himself in the middle of the night—to such a mess.) N.A.S.A. has understandably sought to hush up unfavorable publicity about this noxious "glitch" in our extra-terrestrial plans.

And it refuses any longer to discuss (as it announced several missions ago) that annoying problem, that nuisance, which it has designated euphemistically as "space adaptation syndrome." This is its forward-looking, up-winging name for the obstinate reluctance of the human body—a product of millions of years of earthly co-evolution with terrestrial conditions—immediately to accept the Cartesian intellect's transcendental, unearthly aspirations for it. Stopped-up toilets in space, "space adaptation syndrome"—these vexations of the spirit for Body Snatchers are mortifying because they bring vividly into focus the essential anality of the whole "modern" project as I have sought to trace it. "Trying extra-hard to protect [ourselves] against the accidents of life and danger of death," seeking, in Faustian fashion, to "triumph over natural mystery" (especially humiliating natural mysteries like excretion), fantasizing about escaping entirely our animal past in an exosomatic leap of faith, the Body Snatching mentality is not just a *longing for* a universal destiny, it is a *running from* the human condition. One hundred and fifty years ago, Sören Kierkegaard (appalled at the triumph of abstract intellectuality from Descartes to Hegel) noted of his decidedly

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"modern" contemporaries (while thinking of Mozart's *Don Giovanni*) that they were governed by a kind of "dread," and yet dread, he saw, was inseparable from their energy. The same might be said of those committed to envisioning and enacting the unearthing and/or excarnation of man.

In their *On the Psychology of Meditation*, Claudio Narranjo and Robert E. Ornstein call attention to the Surangama Sutra in which the Buddha "ties one knot after another in a handkerchief, and after each . . . asks his disciple Ananda, 'What is this?'" Buddha then asks Ananda yet another question, inquiring whether all knots can be untied at the same time. "'No, Blessed Lord!'" Ananda replies. "'Since the knots were tied one after another in a certain order, we cannot untie them, unless we follow the reverse order.'" Narranjo and Ornstein then supply the following exegesis and commentary:

> To start with the last knot, in the Buddhist darshan, means *to start with the body*, and within the body (in the chakra system) with its most body-like region, the foundation, or lower area. The contrast between East and West in this last aspect is also suggestive of the predominant spirit of the respective cultures: *Western man, in his ambition to fly out of his body, has identified with the head*, or, at lowest, with the heart. Orientals, with no less spiritual ambition, have stressed the importance of *attaining rootedness in the body first* and have cultivated the feeling of the center of gravity in the belly. (my emphasis)

Body Snatching is "anal" precisely because it does not first seek this "rootedness in the body." Pretentiously claiming already to know the "origin of all things," it proclaims itself to be capable and deserving of fiddling with the very constitution of the world, of untying the knots of creation. It seeks, in an age of advanced technology at the service of an unquenchable *res cogitans*, to literalize the Buddha's metaphor, thus making possible an unearned, undeserved, quick exit through the head.

Carbon Chauvinists like myself, on the other hand, unembarrassed by the Shuttle's plumbing difficulties (in which they find the stuff of evolutionary irony), are content for the time being to be "stuck in old concepts" as they seek to discover their own rootedness—to feel at home here on Earth, com-

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pleting their earthly odyssey before embarking on an endless cosmic one. In the face of their accusers they shout as their creed the words of that most earthy of writers, Montaigne:

> It is an absolute perfection and virtually divine to know how to enjoy our being rightfully. We seek other conditions because we do not understand the use of our own, and go outside of ourselves because we do not know what it is like inside. Yet there is no use our mounting on stilts, for on stilts we must still walk on our legs. And on the loftiest throne in the world we are still sitting on our own rump [*sur notre cul*].

I doubt, however, that they will be amused. Body Snatchers are a humorless sort.

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CARL DJERASSI

Castor's Dilemma

Professor I. Castor knew perfectly well that he was eligible for a Nobel Prize—in fact, during the past couple of years, the subject had never been far from his mind. He was quite aware that timing was critical: if he were to win the Prize, it would have to happen during the next three or, at most, four years, while his field was still red-hot.

In the cancer field, a generalized theory of tumor production is Mt. Everest. Only superstars climb Everest, and I. Castor was such a superstar. One day, he had a spectacular idea about tumorigenesis—the kind that a scientist gets once, or if fantastically lucky, twice in a lifetime, like Watson and Crick's double helix. Even more importantly, he conceived of an experiment—a bold approach to his Everest—that would unambiguously convert his theory into fact.

Castor still remembered the day, just a few months ago, when he stepped out of the interminable fog of discarded theories into the sudden sunlight of an idea, which he felt intuitively to be right. All he needed was one successful experiment and he had the man to do it: Jeremiah P. Stafford, who had only recently obtained his Ph.D. degree in Castor's lab.

Usually, Castor was both informal and comfortable with his star student. This time, however, the professor did not look at him, but past him—at the blackboard behind Stafford's back."I've never before asked you to drop an experiment in midstream, but I'm going to do it now." He looked expectantly at the young man, but Stafford offered no response. With Stafford, it had become a game not to show any expression during these scientific tête-à-têtes. Much as he revered his mentor, he always imagined himself in a subtle battle of strength in which he defended some private territory that Castor would not be allowed to penetrate.

"Furthermore," Castor's eyes had again begun to wander, "I'd like you not to talk to anybody about what I'll tell you."

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He quickly glanced at Stafford. This time, Castor had won a point: the young man's surprise was all too evident. Though fiercely ambitious, Castor loved to talk about his ideas to peers, colleagues and students, and never worried about getting scooped. The professor's openness was legendary. No wonder bright graduate students competed for the few available spaces in his laboratory. But for once, Castor was keeping his mouth shut. He had not brought up his new theory in his weekly research seminar, nor had he called Karl Krauss, the Harvard cancer doyen, who even had a sarcoma named after him. He'd picked only one confidant and Stafford appreciated the magnitude of the compliment.

Thrilled, Stafford grabbed some paper and scribbled notes as he listened to the outline of the experiment and the plan of attack. Castor felt that the experiment could be done in less than three months. "Jerry, you do understand why I want this experiment to be kept quiet, don't you? This is not the usual 'if' experiment. This experiment will be in all the textbooks; it's the sort you encounter once in a lifetime. Look how lucky you are: it's taken me over fifty years, while you . . ."

Castor's voice trailed off as he gazed at his young collaborator with affection and a tinge of envy. Stafford was his all-time favorite student, and to that extent deserved this chance. But what a chance it was! If only he had been offered such an opportunity at age twenty-six! When Castor resumed, it was business as usual. "Jerry, you do know what's at stake here. Let's go to work."

In less than two months Stafford produced the expected results. Castor was triumphant. He stayed up all night writing the first draft of the brief communication to be published in *Nature*—the most widely read journal in his field. The paper's authors were I. Castor and J. P. Stafford. According to Castor, the order was purely alphabetical, but one of the laboratory cynics had wondered why there were never any Allens or Browns in the group. There had been an exchange fellow from Prague, named Czerny, but that was the closest alphabetical proximity to Castor that had occurred.

"A Generalized Theory of Tumorigenesis" was promptly

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accepted for publication. When the *Nature* article appeared, even Castor was staggered by the number of reprint requests. The colleague he respected most—Karl Krauss of Harvard—called to say that this paper could not possibly escape notice in Stockholm. "I. C.—if I were an envious man, I'd be now bright green. But you know I'm not." His chuckle sounded almost convincing. "If I couldn't think of this experiment then at least I'm glad you did." Castor could feel the warm blush spill over his face. It wasn't due to embarrassment, just sheer pleasure. Krauss's Harvard was a place that counted Nobel laureates almost by the dozen. However, at Castor's Midwestern university, only one Nobel Prize had ever been won, and that was in the 1930s. Getting a Nobel five decades later would put I.C. in a class all by himself. You couldn't do that at Harvard or Berkeley!

At such moments, scientific etiquette demands modesty. But the demure look toward the floor, the disclaimer with the hands often as not look faked when seen. The telephone is kinder.

Castor rose to the occasion. "Karl, I knew it was a good idea" (*Good? It was the greatest idea I've ever had!*), "but I was also lucky. I've told you before about Jeremiah Stafford. The guy has golden hands—you've never seen such lab technique. I don't know if anyone else could've pulled this off."

For three months, Castor basked on the summit of his Everest—lectures, seminars, and symposia—where he presented *our* experiment. Was it a royal we or a true plural? One never knows with a scientist, who is taught in graduate school never to use the first person singular, even in the absence of any coworkers.

One afternoon, Karl Krauss telephoned to say that one of his best associates ("You remember him, I. C., don't you? He's my Stafford") had been unable to replicate Stafford's experiment. Such failure was not unheard of in their field. After all, Castor and Stafford had only published a preliminary paper without presenting experimental details. Castor asked Stafford to prepare a precise description of the laboratory protocols so that they could be sent promptly to Harvard. Stafford agreed.

Within a couple of days, Stafford, who had never missed a

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day in four years of graduate school, called the professor's secretary rather than Castor.

"Stephanie, please tell I. C. that I caught the flu. I feel so lousy, I don't even want to explain to him why I can't prepare the report for Krauss just now."

The message annoyed Castor. Stafford, who had taken immediately to the eighty-hour work weeks in Castor's laboratory; who pronounced the word "vacation" with a disdain born out of scientific machismo; whom Castor had always found in the laboratory—this Stafford had to pick *this* time to feel ill. Castor's annoyance escalated to real irritation when, a few days later, he was told that Stafford had telephoned from Florida: his grandfather had suffered a heart attack. "Where the hell is the man's loyalty," he thought, "to his grandfather or to the lab project?"

Such gracelessness was not typical of Castor, but he was under some pressure because one did not keep Krauss waiting. This Harvard professor was in a class by himself, and especially so when the validity of a key experiment was in question. Castor decided on a sloppy but simple shortcut: he would photocopy the appropriate pages from Stafford's laboratory notebook, and send these to Harvard with a brief explanatory letter.

There was nothing improper in copying Stafford's laboratory notebook. In contrast to personal diaries, a scientist's diary is expected to be produced on demand for inspection by others. Invariably, such notebooks are solidly bound, with pre-numbered pages, and all entries written down chronologically. Like all great expedition leaders, Castor was fanatic about details. Everything had to be entered in the lab notebooks with indelible ink, not pencil; even trivial calculations had to be put into the notebook rather than jotted down elsewhere on loose sheets. Every beginning graduate student got the same speech: "You can't put too much into your notebook, but you can write too little. You never know which details may turn out to be crucial." When the students departed from Castor's laboratory, the notebooks stayed behind.

What Castor saw in Stafford's notebook bothered him. The experimental protocol was indeed there, but the precise details seemed surprisingly scant. After some effort, he succeeded in reaching Stafford on the phone in Florida.

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"I hope your grandfather is getting better." Castor left no opening for a reply, because he did not consider it a question.

He continued. "Jerry, you know that Krauss is having one of his postdocs repeat *our* experiment. You know they're having trouble repeating it and I can't let Krauss wait much longer for the experimental details. I thought I'd simply send him Xeroxes of your lab notebook . . ."

All Castor heard was a low "Yes?"

"I hadn't looked at your notebook for months . . ." Castor could not continue, because Stafford had moved promptly to the offensive.

"Well you had no reason to do so. Except for our last *Nature* article"—there was no ambiguity about *our* in this instance—"you'd asked me to write the first draft of all of our joint manuscripts."

"Yes, I know." Whatever accusatory nuance had existed in Castor's earlier tone had now been punctured. Unlike his superstar colleagues, who hardly ever wrote drafts of manuscripts that bore their names as co-authors, Castor, until recently, had always written the first draft. But even he, I. Castor—the superstar who had resisted the temptation of huge research groups in order to have time for scrupulous experimental confirmation and writing—even he had made an exception in recent years with Jeremiah Stafford. This exceptional treatment was only one of several subtle indications that Stafford was being groomed as Castor's successor. Except for Stafford, nobody in the laboratory ever called Castor "I. C." to his face. "Professor Castor" or, on occasion, "Prof" was established etiquette. Only outsiders or professional equals "eye-seed" Castor. Nobody remembered when Stafford had joined this select club. It was not that he had been specifically invited; one day he was just there.

Castor's tone had turned apologetic. "Jerry, I can't send just Xerox copies of your notebook pages to Krauss. There are too many missing details. Why Jerry, you don't even indicate which buffer you used in the original extraction; you don't give the column support for your high-pressure liquid chromatography experiment; you don't say where the arginase came from . . ."

Stafford's interruption was peremptory. "I know, I. C., but these are trivia. This is routine stuff, and you know what time

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pressure I was working under. Finishing what I did"—the first person singular was verbally underlined—"in less than three months took some doing. I guess I was just sloppy with my notebook entries. Why don't you let me write up the missing details—I'll be back by Wednesday and you'll have them in your office first thing Friday morning."

This was what Castor wanted to hear. The letter to Krauss was mailed the following week.

In less than one month, Krauss called to say that his associate, an experienced enzymologist, had still been unable to replicate the key experiment. Castor gave the expected reply: "Karl, I'll repeat the experiment myself with Stafford. Then, I'll invite your man to come to my lab and do it with us."

Krauss agreed that this was the most reasonable course; he assured I. C. that until he heard from him, the Harvard group would not publish their failure to repeat what had become known as the "Castor-Stafford Experiment." Naming an experiment or theory after the original authors is the ultimate historical accolade in science. However, it is rarely bestowed without eventual independent verification, which Krauss had intended to provide.

Castor immediately summoned Stafford and presented him with the facts: the experiment could not be repeated in Krauss's laboratory. He suspected that a minor but essential experimental variable, not recognized by them, was the reason for their failure. He asked Stafford to perform the experiment with him in his private laboratory.

The weeks passed quickly and without difficulty. Of course, this did not mean much, because everything depended on the final enzyme assay which was due on the following Monday. When Castor arrived in the morning, nervous and concerned, he met an impressively confident and self-assured Stafford. Within a few hours, Castor was in a joyous mood. The assay had come out as expected; the experiment had indeed worked. The professor announced the results at a special group seminar and publicly congratulated his favorite collaborator. He also used the occasion to do a bit of preaching about the importance of laboratory notebook discipline.

When Castor returned to his office, he found a sealed envelope that simply read "Professor Castor—CONFIDEN-

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TIAL." The message, unsigned and typed, consisted of only one sentence: *Why was Dr. Stafford in your private laboratory on Sunday evening?*

For Castor, the dilemma was enormous. The correct step would have been to call in Stafford, to confront him with the accusation, to repeat the experiment without Stafford, and if he failed in the experiment, to inform Krauss of what had transpired. In addition, he would then have to undergo the expected public penance: a letter published in *Nature* in which he would withdraw the "Castor–Stafford Experiment." The standard ending would be "pending experimental verification," but everybody would know that fraud was probably involved if Stafford's name was not included in such a letter. If Castor had put on this hair shirt, his tumorigenesis theory would have been just that: one more theory, on an ever-mounting heap of discarded ones, in the cancer field. Yet he felt in his bones that his theory had to be right. Even before this disaster, Castor had thought of a second experiment that might provide independent verification. It was risky, but Castor felt that there was now too much at stake—not the least of which was a possible Nobel Prize.

Castor decided to say nothing—neither to Stafford nor to Krauss. By saying nothing, he considered himself still unbesmirched by any possible scandal. Furthermore, instead of wasting precious weeks on another attempted repetition of Stafford's experiment—by thinking of it as "Stafford's," Castor had already passed mental judgement on the affair—he started on the new experiment, the one he had not mentioned to a soul.

Castor's sudden unavailability stunned his collaborators, but none more than Stafford. In the past, most students, and certainly Stafford, were privy to what the Professor was doing with his own hands. This time, even Stafford's request to see Castor in his laboratory was met by a totally unexpected response from the secretary, who usually just waved Stafford in: "I'm sorry Jerry, but Professor Castor is working on a very important experiment. All I can do is take a message."

Stafford became frantic. He always had open access to the Professor's laboratory; now he was staring at a locked door. This exclusion of Castor's favorite set the lab's rumor mill go-

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ing full blast. Stafford's anxiety became almost unbearable; he thought of writing a letter, but he wasn't sure what to say in it. Demand an explanation? Give an explanation?

In the end, no letter, nothing, was required. The second experiment—Castor's independent proof of his tumorigenesis theory—did work. He had vindicated his earlier optimism about the viability of his brainchild.

Rather than rushing into print in *Nature*, Castor played it cool and cautious. He telephoned Krauss: it was now unnecessary for the Harvard group to examine further the verification of the "Castor-Stafford Experiment," because he had just completed a second and experimentally simpler one. In a subtle way, Castor forced Krauss to center his attention on his own experiment, and away from Stafford's.

"Karl, just wait till you see the details. It's a beauty, but I won't write it up until someone in your lab has repeated *my* work. Before I publish this experiment, I want to be absolutely sure that nobody has problems repeating it. I'll send you Xerox copies of my own lab notebook by Federal Express. You'll get them tomorrow." Krauss could not help but agree to become the irreproachable witness of Castor's scientific veracity. What nobody could predict at this time was that Krauss would also spoil Castor's triumph: When the great Krauss eventually published his confirmation of Castor's second experiment—of course, he waited until Castor's triumphant paper had appeared in *Nature*—he referred to that experiment quite innocently, but indelibly, as the "Castor Confirmation." For Krauss and every reader, Castor's solo experiment simply confirmed the generalized tumorigenesis theory, whose authors were *Castor and Stafford*.

All this was still in the future. Since Castor was certain that his latest work would be confirmed at Harvard, he had no reason to delay announcing his success through the time-tested laboratory grapevine. He called a special departmental seminar and announced that he would be speaking—without listing a title. Only stars can use such a ploy. Starlets run the risk of an empty room.

In Castor's case, even without the mystery of an untitled talk, his virtual disappearance for weeks from public view would have guaranteed a jammed lecture hall. Stafford delib-

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erately arrived late. As he sat in the back, he was convinced that he was about to witness his own public crucifixion. Shortly after Castor's start, it became obvious that Stafford was not even a participant in the drama about to be presented to the hushed audience. Without referring to Krauss's inability to validate Stafford's work, Castor reported his *second* experimental proof of the generalized tumorigenesis theory. Within hours, the news had spread by long-distance telephone to all key laboratories.

In the excitement, nobody had noticed that Stafford had slipped out of the seminar room just as the applause started. He headed straight for the professor's office. "Stephanie." Stafford's voice was composed as he sank into a chair in the secretary's office. He acted as if the last few weeks had not existed. "I. C. just gave the most fabulous talk you could imagine. I just thought I'd wait for him here—I want to tell him what I thought of the seminar." Stafford did not mind that he had to wait for a long time; he knew that Castor would be surrounded by a throng of admiring students and colleagues at the conclusion of his lecture. It would give him time to rehearse his little speech.

Stafford was silently debating whether to offer detached congratulations or bubbling enthusiasm when Castor appeared. The young man jumped up. "Prof"—he did not consider "I. C." appropriate under the circumstances and "Professor Castor" clearly too formal—"could I see you for a moment in your office?"

Castor merely looked at his student and then motioned him into his office. As soon as the door was closed, Stafford switched gears. "I. C.—I just wanted to see you alone for a moment, because I knew that down in the lecture room you'd be surrounded by everyone. I just wanted to tell you that this was the most fantastic lecture I ever heard. I'd been concerned when I didn't see you for all these weeks, but now I'm relieved."

The older man's expression did not change. "You damn well ought to be," was all he said.

Climbing Everest by two different routes is sensational; hardly anybody has been photographed twice on top. This

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time, Castor's basking on the summit was terminated much quicker than the first time around. Again, the message was from Harvard, the bearer Karl Krauss: He congratulated Castor on the brilliant conception of the second experiment and informed him that the verification of Castor's results had already started. Castor felt elated; a potentially devastating situation was well on the way to a permanent resolution.

But then Krauss continued. "By the way, I. C., your man Stafford called. He asked whether I'd offer him a postdoctorate fellowship in my lab. He said that he'd spent all of his experimental life in your department, and wanted to work on some other problems before looking for an assistant professorship.

"With other people, I wouldn't even have called. But since he's working with you, I wanted to check whether you'd mind if he joined my group. I know your fabulous opinion of Stafford. But you're familiar with our red tape. We need some letters of recommendation in the files, and obviously, one must come from you. Actually, Stafford didn't even list you as a reference; he mentioned that he didn't want to bother you with such a trivial request. In reality, I think he was worried that you might be annoyed that he wants to work in another lab."

Underneath, Krauss had felt somewhat guilty, which explained this avalanche of words. Now he waited for a response, but none came. For once, Castor was speechless. His friend mistook the silence for disapproval. He hastened on. "I. C.—you've got to admit, almost anything the man would do now in your place would be an anti-climax after the spectacular work the two of you published in *Nature*. Could you send me a letter about him? It needn't be long—just write what you've always told me: that he was the best man you've ever had in your lab."

A monstrous dilemma was now facing Castor. If he refused to send a letter, he would have to explain the reason to Krauss. After all, I. C. could not just claim that he wanted to keep Stafford around, and, therefore, would not recommend his best student. But if he did write such a letter, Castor would never again be able to erase the "Castor-Stafford Experiment" without implicating himself. An enthusiastic letter

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of recommendation to Krauss would permanently close the door to such a withdrawal. In a flash, Castor realized that Stafford had challenged him with fiendishly clever blackmail. He decided to pay the ransom, and by May of that year, Stafford had departed for Harvard.

For thirty-five minutes, October 17th could have been called the shortest, best day of Castor's life. I. C. was an early riser, who needed no alarm clock. Shortly after 6:00 A.M., while he was showering, the phone rang. Castor had intended to let it ring, but the persistence of the caller finally drove him, dripping wet, to the bedside phone.

"Professor Isidore Castor?" The man's accented voice was unfamiliar; furthermore, nobody had called Castor "Isidore" for decades. He decided to be noncommittal. "Who's calling?"

"Sven Lundholm from the *Svenska Dagbladet* in Stockholm."

"Yes?" Castor was barely able to utter this single word, so full of suspense, desire, triumph, and some deviousness. He wanted to pretend cool detachment, but his heart was pounding. Every winner had wondered—gratefully, to be sure—why the first call invariably came from a reporter. "Yes," he added more forcefully, "this is Professor Isidore Castor speaking." (*Isidore Castor? My God, this sounds like a stranger!*) "What can I do for you?"

"I have the honor to congratulate you on your winning the Nobel Prize in Physiology and Medicine." Castor did not mind the pompous words; in fact, they had hardly registered. "I wonder whether you have any comments?"

"Comments? No, I don't. I don't even know whether it's true." Castor remembered the embarrassment of Vincent Du Vigneaud, who publicly acknowledged his pleasure when a reporter congratulated him prematurely for winning a Nobel Prize. In Du Vigneaud's case, the reporter had been premature by one full year!

"Professor Castor!" The man sounded outraged. "Surely you do not believe that I am calling from Stockholm to make a joke?"

"How do I know you're calling from Stockholm?" Castor figured he could afford caution, even at the risk of insulting the caller.

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"Do you want to call me back in Stockholm?" shot back the reporter. "I can give you the number of the *Svenska Dagbladet*."

"Never mind," replied Castor, who was enjoying himself, "I'll comment, but for the time being it's off the record."

"How do you feel having won the Nobel Prize?" Castor could almost see the reporter rise, as he pronounced the last two words, and bow from the waist down.

"Frankly, I haven't thought about it, but if it's true, it's a great surprise. If it's true," he repeated the words for emphasis, "then it's not just an enormous honor, but also recognition for the efforts of my entire team of collaborators over the years."

This was the sort of stilted answer that most reporters, even Swedish ones, recognize as fake. The man continued on another tack. "Professor, what will you do with the prize money? Have you decided how to spend it?"

Castor was taken aback. "No, of course not. I haven't even thought about it." This time, the answer was totally correct, but the reporter persisted.

"But you do know how much money goes with the prize?"

Again, Castor replied honestly. "Well, I know it's a lot, but I don't know exactly how much."

It was a lot of money, but only half of what Castor had imagined. As soon as the Stockholm reporter hung up, Castor turned on the radio to listen to the news. He missed the key words by just a second or two. ". . . this almost completes an American sweep of this year's Nobel Prizes. Only the one in literature is still to be announced next week."

"Dammit," thought Castor, "do I have to wait for the 7:00 o'clock news to hear the name, or should I call the radio station?" Actually, he did not have to do anything. The first telephone call followed shortly thereafter. Karl Krauss was on the line.

"I. C." His voice was warm and excited. Genuine pleasure flowed over the telephone. "I hope I'm one of the first to congratulate you. You really deserved this Nobel Prize. I'll bet you'll be amused by what I have to tell you. Guess what the announcer said when the Nobel Prize in Medicine was announced this morning over the local Boston station?"

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"I haven't got the foggiest idea," countered Castor.

"Come on," coaxed Krauss, "just guess!"

"OK." Castor played along with his friend. "Midwestern cancer whiz wins Nobel."

"Wrong!" Krauss was triumphant. "He started out with 'another Nobel Prize won by Harvard man.' Can you beat our local chauvinism? It's typical of Harvard."

"I don't get it." Castor sounded puzzled. "Why should he've said this?"

"What do you mean you don't get it—you Midwestern yokel. We are so damn anxious to add to our list of Nobel laureates, everybody here is including Stafford on the Harvard roster. Ridiculous, isn't it?"

"Stafford? You mean . . . ?"

The seeds for the Castor-Stafford combination were probably sown in 1923, when MacLeod and Banting won the Nobel Prize in Physiology and Medicine for Banting's and Best's discovery of insulin. The outcry about the injustice of Professor MacLeod, the director of the laboratory, sharing the Nobel Prize, while young Charles Best, who had performed the crucial experiment, had been ignored, persisted for decades. Since then, the Swedes had almost leaned over backwards to recognize a younger collaborator. Milstein and Jerne, together with a much younger Georges Koehler, in 1983 were only the most recent example of such a shared Nobel Prize; the Castor-Stafford combination probably seemed just to most. After all, the key paper—the one which succinctly, but unequivocally, described the generalized theory of tumorigenesis together with its first experimental proof—had carried the names of both Castor and Stafford.

One of the common courtesies among new Nobel laureates is to congratulate a co-winner, before acknowledging the dozens or even hundreds of congratulatory messages. Yet Castor could not make himself write the conventional letter to Stafford, and strangely, the young man did not contact his mentor.

Like most serious contenders for the Nobel Prize, Castor knew all about the ceremonies: The actual award is presented on an afternoon in early December by the King of Sweden,

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followed by a spectacular dinner and dance at Stockholm's lovely Town Hall. Later in the week, a major public lecture—subsequently published in book as well as journal form—is given by each winner. This lecture, more than anything else, represents the historical record of the winner's scientific immortality.

The weeks before the actual award of the Nobel Prize are clearly the best. Parties, interviews, accolades of every sort, are the usual fare; the novelty has not yet worn off, the prize money has not yet been spent. Castor had no idea what Stafford was doing, but for I. C. the pressure was building up inexorably. All he could think of was the actual ceremony, when he and Stafford would stand together before the King of Sweden, with the world press and TV covering every detail. But this was nothing compared to Castor's fear of the scientific lecture expected of him and of Stafford. Since both were sharing the Prize for the same discovery, common sense and courtesy would require that they consult each other to decide who would say what, and in which order. But Stafford made no move.

Late one evening in mid-November, after having received a letter from Stockholm asking him to present the first scientific lecture, to be followed by Stafford's, Castor could take the pressure no longer. He sat down at his desk, and wrote the lines which subsequently caused such a sensation: "It is with heavy heart that I . . ."

Was this to be the preamble to a Nobel Prize lecture or to a suicide note? As he set these words on paper, Isidore Castor realized in a flash that it would not make any difference. For once, there was no dilemma to be resolved.

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DANA GIOIA

Meeting Mr. Cheever

I was supposed to meet John Cheever in the fall of 1974 when I was a graduate student at Harvard and a tutor at Radcliffe's North House. Among my modest duties at the house was helping run a weekly literary table for undergraduates. Every Wednesday we would read work by a contemporary author and discuss it over dinner, and, if the arguments got lively, continue later over drinks in the nearby apartment of our obliging faculty sponsors. The notion of a planned literary table may sound unbearably stuffy, but in practice it usually provided interesting conversations about good books. It also gave this otherwise remote house, located almost a mile from the heart of Harvard, an excuse to invite local writers to dinner.

That fall John Cheever had begun teaching in the Boston University writing program, the most active and well-publicized graduate program in the area, whose faculty also included Anne Sexton, John Malcolm Brinnin, and George Starbuck. I knew a girl in the program, and whenever we met I would quiz her about her courses and teachers, especially Cheever, whose work I had admired for years. To my surprise she said that Cheever seemed lost and lonely in Boston and suggested that I invite him to North House for dinner. She even offered to make the arrangements. A few days later she called to confirm the time and place for Cheever's visit, adding, "Make sure you have something to drink." I immediately went out and bought three bottles of a good red wine to ease his arrival.

A flier announcing the visit went out to North House students, and the members of the literary table were assigned "The Enormous Radio," "The Swimmer," and a few other stories to prepare for the evening. I called his apartment over near Kenmore Square a few times to see if he needed direc-

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tions, but no one ever answered. "Don't worry," my friend at B.U. told me. "It's all set up."

Attendance the night of Cheever's visit was excellent. Every regular member of the group was there plus a few new faces. One student even wore a tie. Sitting in North House's fanciest common room with three open but untasted bottles of red wine, we all waited for our guest of honor. Half an hour passed. Then an hour. Finally just as the dinner service was about to close, we scooped up the bottles and rushed into the dining room to secure some food—including an extra tray for our guest, who never appeared.

I tried calling my friend to ask what had gone wrong, but I couldn't reach her at first. By the time I did a week later another terrifying event took precedence. Answering the phone, she told me that Anne Sexton had just killed herself. My friend was frantic and confused, and by comparison Cheever's non-appearance seemed negligible. I never mentioned it. Not until a few months later when Cheever suddenly left Boston University because of a drinking problem did I guess what might have happened the night of our invitation.

A little over a year later I had left Harvard's Comparative Literature program for the Stanford Business School. German, French and English literature had been replaced by Finance, Accounting and Statistics, but some things remained constant. I was still living as an advisor in an undergraduate dormitory and still running a literary table, though this time more quixotically among the decidedly unintellectual denizens of Florence Moore Hall (or "Flo Mo" as it was universally known), a dour complex of concrete-block dormitories in the postwar institutional style sometimes referred to by Californians as "early Gestapo."

One day in mid-January 1976 I stopped by the Flo Mo office to check my message box. The secretary told me there was a writer coming the next day who would be staying in the guest room for a week. The housemaster wanted me to show him around.

"What's his name?" I asked unenthusiastically. She looked at her reservation card and read, "John Cheever." For a moment I forgave the housemaster all of his interminable staff meetings.

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Intoxicated by the news of Cheever's visit, I mentioned it to some undergraduates, but soon learned that none of them knew who he was. Undismayed, I decided I would show them and went off to the university bookstore only to discover that all but one of his books were out of print. Determined to get some of his work in circulation among the students before his arrival, I made the rounds of the local used bookstores where, one by one, I picked up about a dozen copies, including some remaindered hardcover editions of *The World of Apples*, stamped with large blurry red H's on the flyleaf and priced at 99¢. I passed these books out to some of the more pliable freshmen with firm instructions to read the stories checked in pencil (such precise directions were needed since none of them could be trusted to read an entire volume). Meanwhile, remembering my friend's advice from Boston, I also bought some wine.

January 1976 marked the nadir of Cheever's literary reputation. His last novel, *Bullet Park* (1969), had received poor reviews, and *The World of Apples* (1973) with its mere handful of stories published in the last decade seemed meager compared to Cheever's previously generous collection. His work had stopped appearing in *The New Yorker* and now surfaced at the rate of about one story per year only in magazines like *The Saturday Evening Post* and *Playboy*, which were known to pay well for inferior work by famous authors. His critical reputation had never gained the stature of his most notable contemporaries like Updike, Bellow, Mailer, Pynchon or Barth. He was not so much discussed as routinely dismissed as a dated suburban satirist, and he had become a sort of ceremonial scapegoat for all the real and imagined sins of *The New Yorker*. He was credited with a few ingenious stories of middle-class *Angst*, but his novels were considered messy amalgamations of short stories. Without the support of critics or teachers and with little new work to call attention to himself, Cheever had lost the younger generation of readers. They were reading his contemporaries, sometimes even as class assignments, but his work was now largely unknown. Even if they wanted to try one of his books, it would have been difficult since they were mainly out of print. And nowhere was his reputation lower than among the radical chic of Northern California

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who did not spare him their most obscene epithets—elitist, Eastern, suburban and (their lips tightening to a sneer) unabashedly middle class.

The next morning the house secretary phoned me to say that Cheever had arrived. She asked me to go over and show him around the campus, adding in a quiet tone, which seemed to bespeak all of history's lost causes, "He wants to eat in the dorm." Sensing that here indeed was a man in need of guidance, I hurried over.

The Florence Moore guest room was a tiny concrete-block cubicle set on ground level at the end of a dormitory hallway. Rarely used except by visiting parents in distress and a few relatives of foreign students who didn't know better, its stark walls and low ceiling contained a steel bed, a small desk, a dresser and a closet-sized bathroom. Everything but the furniture was painted a pale institutional green.

Not surprisingly, Cheever was pleased even to see me. I apologized for the sparseness of the room, but he immediately replied with the chivalrous generosity, which would characterize his stay, that it was absolutely perfect. The room had a desk and windows, he pointed out, as if these were rare appurtenances in the world of accommodations. His compliments seemed so sincere that momentarily I felt I had done that obviously splendid suite an injustice.

Although Cheever looked almost exactly like his many dust jacket photographs, I was initially surprised by three things about him. First, he was so small. For some reason, probably not unconnected with my mental images of his fictional protagonists, I had expected a magisterially tall Yankee gentleman instead of this slight, almost boyish man who stood only a few inches over five feet. Second, Cheever was the most perfectly poised man I had ever met. Every gesture was so gracefully conceived and executed that he scarcely seemed part of the clumsy everyday world. Even the way he sat still seemed as carefully composed as a professional portrait. Not that his presence was domineering or dramatic; just the opposite was true. His manner was relaxed, understated, and self-assured, but he nevertheless had a style that captivated one's attention the way a great actor can steal a scene on stage without speaking a word. Finally, I was stunned by his voice.

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Cheever spoke a brand of patrician Massachusetts English which I now suspect he invented, for I have never heard anyone else speak quite like it. Nevertheless, he used this suave, fictional dialect so convincingly that in his mouth it seemed to have the force of ancient authority, as if he were some New England Homer standing at the apex of a long oral tradition.

I had talked to men funnier or wiser than Cheever, more inventive or intelligent, more perceptive or likeable, but I had never met anyone who exhibited these qualities so generously in such deft balance. His wasn't the pedestrian balance of an earnest earthbound mind but the arduous equilibrium of an acrobat. His conversation was the natural extension of his physical poise. He never said anything merely for effect, but virtually everything he said was phrased effectively. Almost every sentence boasted some unusual detail that made both the thought and the language seem remarkable. Yet there wasn't anything pretentious about his conversation, if only because he never stopped paying attention to his listeners. He was not a brilliant monologuist repeating the same anecdotes verbatim into the footlights, but a consummately engaging conversationalist. One had the feeling he watched his listeners' every response and tailored even the oldest story to their special requirements. The freshmen, who largely did not care much about literature, appreciated this attention which was one reason why they always joined him at meals (whereas usually they dreaded sitting with visiting faculty). His conversation never excluded them. It was intelligent without being intellectual, informed but not pedantic. And he was very funny. After all, as he once said, "You can't expect to communicate with anyone if you're a bore."

We talked in the guest room for quite a while because Cheever asked that we wait for his son, Fred (or Federico to give his full Christian name, which his father enjoyed using). They had arrived together, but Fred would be staying with some friends from Andover elsewhere on campus.

The ostensible object of Cheever's visit to Stanford was to see what kind of school it would be for his son. Indeed, both as we waited that morning and over the next week, he quizzed me repeatedly about the school, the faculty, the area, even the sports teams. Likewise he enjoyed discussing the rel-

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ative merits of Stanford versus other schools with the Flo Mo freshmen who were delighted to be treated as authorities on something. But I couldn't help thinking that these efforts were done more for his own edification than Fred's. He talked constantly about his son, but in an oddly formal way for a father. He seemed very consciously trying to play the role of the perfect father—especially around the freshmen—but his performance had a certain studied air that betrayed it as the sincere effort of a man who had difficulty in showing his love for his children.

When Fred finally appeared it was obvious he needed no paternal assistance in sizing up Stanford. Having made sure that his father was safely ensconced at Flo Mo, he quickly left to rejoin his friends from Andover with whom he spent the rest of the week. Until he and his father returned East a week later, I saw them together again only once. Yet neither of them seemed to mind.

Fred looked a great deal like his father, though he was slightly taller and more handsome. But father and son were dressed identically in the not-yet-fashionable preppy style—tweed sports coats, crew neck sweaters over long-sleeved shirts, slacks and penny loafers. While this was not especially remarkable for Fred, who after all was a preppy, it was hardly usual for a sixty-three-year-old man. But rather than seeming odd, Cheever's clothes suited him perfectly. He had never bothered to grow old. He still seemed a brilliant young man, not a sagacious patriarch. And no one who met him that week would have put him much older than fifty.

As his staff host, I expected to see very little of Cheever after taking him to lunch that day. To my astonishment, I spent most of the next week with him. He had arrived at Stanford with the best of intentions but the vaguest of plans. Since Fred was busy following his own agenda, his father had nothing to do except wait for a class visit and the English Department reading toward the end of his stay. Cheever knew no one at Stanford, and the people who might have sought him out were largely unaware he was on campus. Unconcerned by this lack of attention, he just hung around Flo Mo, treating this large, spider-shaped complex like a resort hotel. He would linger over meals until the last student left and

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then go off to sit in one of the run-down and usually deserted lounges. Whenever I returned from classes, I would invariably find him sitting by himself smoking in one of the huge Naugahyde chairs. He agreed to almost any suggestion I made—a walk, a drive, a visit. Eventually I gave him a key to my room so he could borrow books or listen to my record player when I was in class.

It is impossible to summarize that week of conversations, spoken in dining halls against the clatter of trays and silverware, in meandering walks through campus, in an old car winding through January-green hills to the Pacific. Now ten years after the fact, the exact words are lost, and with John the exact words were always much of the magic. Still, some of his ideas have stuck with me. But since so much of what one remembers is not what was said but that part of it which one was prepared to hear, I must apologize in advance for these fragments which scarcely do justice to the man they try to evoke.

First, I remember his modesty as a writer, which did not come from any lack of self-esteem but rather from his intense conviction about the importance and difficulty of the writer's vocation. Having already met too many self-absorbed literary mediocrities, I found John's humility before his calling surprisingly pure and unaffected. He was proud of what he had written but without any pretension. He was unconcerned with posterity, which he claimed would take no note of him, for posterity meant less to John than the letters he received from *The New Yorker* readers, those "estimable men and women," who wrote to say how much they enjoyed reading one of his stories. What mattered was literature as an act of shared discovery between the writer and the reader. Fiction, he insisted, was innovative, not by technical experimentation but by being "constantly and profoundly questioning."

I was also impressed by John's candid explanation of his own religious impulses. He told me he went to church and communion every Sunday morning, sitting quietly for the better part of an hour, because this was one place where he could in a small but genuine way become spiritually refreshed. He claimed to believe in God but in an evanescent way impossible to describe adequately to anyone else. Despite

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his loyal high Episcopalian church-going, he was less a Christian than a deist, but one who felt most comfortable worshipping with familiar liturgy in a traditional church. I think religion also had an important social and cultural function for him. In his own heretical version of the Communion of the Saints it was a way to affirm his connection with other people—both living and dead. It also was a means of keeping faith with the past which was at least one reason why he could respond only to traditional liturgy like the Cranmer prayerbook and even the Latin Mass (though he was decidedly not a Catholic). Like literature, great liturgy with its superb language helped cement the past and present. Cheever's religious sense was therefore inseparable from his vocation as a writer, though critics rarely noticed this connection. He was not primarily a satirist of suburban mores but an essentially religious writer whose subject was how contemporary man came to terms with his own mortality against the infinitely beautiful backdrop of the natural world. Was it the unusual surface brilliance of Cheever's work that so often fixated critics on its most literal level?

Finally, I was struck by John's belief that a real writer could and indeed should lead an ordinary life. Genius didn't need to be rootless, disenfranchised or alienated. A writer could have a family, a job and even live in a suburb. His marriage, his children, his home were all immensely important to him. Talking about them, he proselytized in a way he never did about religion. I could feel his passionate concern for these modest human values—indeed I was somewhat dazzled by his talk which could make a mortgage or a report card shimmer divinely like some sacred script. What I did not realize then was how bitterly won these quotidian consolations had been for him.

His insistence on viewing the writer as a whole man colored his judgements on the many authors he had known. We talked, no doubt at my eager prompting, about many of his famous literary friends—Edmund Wilson, John Dos Passos, James Agee, John Updike, and others. But the writer he spoke of most fondly was E. E. Cummings, who had been a sort of literary foster-father for him in his early New York days. Cummings' energy, intelligence, and dedication made a

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profound impression on Cheever, and Estlin, as he called him to my wonderment (how astonished I was back then to hear writers referred to by their first names as if they were not also human beings), had become a model for the kind of writer Cheever liked to consider himself. Later that week he summed up Cummings' importance to him in a characteristically Cheeveresque way saying that the older writer made it clear "that one could be a writer and also remain highly intelligent, totally independent, and be married to one of the most beautiful women in the world."

John also made an odd little comment about his work that has stuck with me. We were talking about some fine point of prose style when he announced, "I have never used italics. Never! If I am tempted to underline my meaning in that crude way, I go back instead and revise the sentence." Almost at once I began noticing how superfluous and heavy-handed most use of italics was. Soon considering them a vulgar typographical trick, I revised them out of my own work, and when one crept in despite my vigilance, I blushed to see it in print. Surely the audience recognized this blunder as a sign of my poor literary breeding. Luckily my typographic puritanism was tempered years later when I came across three italicized words in one paragraph of a Cheever sketch. Granted, it was an uncollected piece, but it comforted me to know that even Homer nods.

During this week at Stanford John had a particular radiance that he had already lost by the time I next saw him two years later. He gave off that almost visible aura of joy and serenity that people have just after they have experienced a genuine religious conversion or suddenly recovered from a long life-threatening illness. It was the joy of having been resurrected from the dead. In John's case it was a resurrection from alcohol. When I offered him some wine the first night of his visit, I was embarrassed by his frankness in discussing his drinking problem. But I soon realized that this victory over alcohol was the base for all of his present happiness. Only a few months out of an alcoholic rehabilitation center, he had no romantic delusions that drinking was fate's price for his poetic soul. It was a destructive addiction he had very painfully overcome.

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The night of his reading some of the freshmen decided they wanted to take John out to dinner. We chose a modest French restaurant in Menlo Park, and a dozen of us came along including the friend who had originally introduced me to Cheever's work. Delighted that the waiter didn't ask for I.D.'s, the freshmen all ordered wine and kept offering it to John who smiled avuncularly and kept to his club soda. He entertained us with stories about teaching creative writing at B.U. and Sing-Sing, claiming that his students at Sing-Sing had shown more aptitude. At the end of the meal as the freshmen searched drunkenly through their wallets, several of them discovered they didn't have enough money to pay their share of dinner. With consummate politeness John quickly took the bill and the inadequate cash at hand and made up the difference from his own pocket, refusing to let either my friend or me chip in more than our share. Not only did John not mind this embarrassing situation, he honestly seemed to enjoy being cast in the role of parent getting his kids out of a jam.

Scheduled at short notice, the reading took place in Bishop Auditorium at the Graduate School of Business, which was the only empty hall on campus. In the car over from the restaurant, John began coughing violently. Arriving at the Business School, we found him a water fountain, but it barely helped. "This isn't nerves," he told us firmly.

Bishop Auditorium was virtually full with about two hundred people, almost all of whom were middle-aged or older. Few students had come and only a fraction of the English faculty. John was introduced by Richard Scowcroft, the head of the Creative Writing Program, who was genuinely excited by Cheever's visit. While his guest of honor hacked away beside him, Scowcroft gave a warmly nostalgic introduction about reading Cheever's stories as a young man. The elegiac tone of Scowcroft's remarks revealed a tacit assumption probably shared by most of the audience that night a year before the publication of *Falconer*. They thought Cheever was now at the end of his career and had long ago written his best work.

John appeared to improvise his program, but actually his first two selections that evening were a set program from which I never subsequently heard him depart. He began with

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"The Death of Justina," one of his best but least celebrated stories, followed by "The Swimmer" (introduced with anecdotes about its filming in Hollywood), and ended with a brief sketch he called "The Death of the Short Story" (it was actually the conclusion to "A Miscellany of Characters That Will Not Appear") which suffered in comparison with its two bewitching predecessors.

That night he began badly, coughing his way through "Justina" and chopping its exquisite opening to bits. But gradually his throat cleared up, and by the time he reached "The Swimmer" his suave storyteller's voice had returned. For the next twenty minutes the audience was mesmerized. Hearing this famous story again, they knew it was a small masterpiece. The spell, however, was quickly broken by the brittle humor of his concluding sketch which seemed small and cold by comparison. Though it was actually an old piece, its minor elegance seemed to confirm rumors of his recent decline. To make matters worse, John also began rushing through the text, perhaps sensing that it was not coming across well. But afterwards the audience applauded generously.

We left John to manage the Creative Writing Department's reception on his own. Outside on the Business School steps we noticed a writing instructor smoking a cigarette. He was telling an undergraduate that Cheever's talent was exhausted.

Cheever's reading was his one public moment at Stanford. Earlier in the week he had had little opportunity to enjoy the special status of a visiting literary celebrity because his arrival had been upstaged by another last-minute visitor, Saul Bellow. Bellow's unexpected sojourn had also been occasioned by a family matter. His new wife was interviewing in the Mathematics Department, and he had accompanied her to tease the University with the prospect of a package deal. The Administration exhibited no hesitation in swallowing the bait.

If Cheever's literary star was in decline that January, Bellow's was indisputably ascendent. His last novel, *Mr. Sammler's Planet*, had won the National Book Award making him the first author ever to win that prestigious prize three times, and his new book, *Humboldt's Gift*, which eventually would win the Pulitzer Prize, had been rapturously received, and his photograph had recently smiled from the cover of several national

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magazines. Moreover, he was widely—and, as it happened, correctly—rumored to be in consideration for a Nobel Prize. An author who never cultivated publicity, he had become an international literary celebrity. The English Department and the Administration waxed ecstatic. One saw a classic author, the other a classy acquisition.

One reason Cheever was left alone during most of his stay was that his hosts were busy courting Bellow. John neither begrudged nor envied Bellow his royal reception for it was obvious, even to an outsider, that like Queen Elizabeth's endless inspections of expanded hospital wings, new army barracks, and improved bridge crossings this tour would offer little enjoyment to the visiting monarch. The Administration had eagerly crammed Bellow's short stay with meetings, parties, speeches, and public appearances.

Bellow bridled at some of the more ludicrous engagements such as speaking in a dormitory to a restless group of students who only vaguely knew who he was, but he generally followed his official schedule with a weary air of obligation. He deceived no one, however, into thinking he was enjoying himself. Administrators wrung their hands, and John, half diplomat/half palace gossip, quietly pointed out each embarrassing academic *faux pas*.

Bellow certainly looked regal. Although like John he was very short and graceful, their similarity ended there. John always seemed amiably relaxed and informal whereas Bellow projected unapproachable dignity and reserve. Entering a room, he appeared intimidatingly confident. At sixty he was still trim and handsome. His well-tanned skin was unwrinkled. His thin grey hair brushed into deceptive thickness. And a king's haberdashery would not have surpassed his wardrobe. His tight, expensively-tailored suits and handsewn shirts stood aloof from the crowds of crumpled tweed and corduroy around him.

On his last evening Bellow agreed to give a short reading, but he requested that the University allow no publicity whatever beforehand. He also asked that to keep it small and informal the reading be held in a student residence. The Administration, anxious to end his visit nicely, planned to preface the reading with a fancy cocktail party and dinner.

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By coincidence the reading was planned for Mirlo, the section of Florence Moore Hall where I served as resident advisor. For this reason I was invited to the preliminary festivities.

Being young and callow, I assumed that writers enjoyed talking with strangers about literature. After all, I did. So at the cocktail party, while Wallace Stegner chatted with Donald Davie and Cheever caught up with Bruce Bliven, I innocently tried to engage Bellow in literary conversation. He winced at each of my eager questions before making his pointedly terse reply. Posterity, alas, will be denied a complete record of our *tête-á-tête* because I have blocked out all but one of the exchanges made before I slinked off in defeat. I only remember asking what contemporary fiction Bellow most admired. "Literature is not a competitive sport," he replied. Unaware I had asked for a game score, I was about to reply, but suddenly he rattled off what I assume was the first-inning batting order for his own literary All-Stars Game: "Wright Morris, J. F. Powers, and a man standing in this room," he paused for effect, ". . . John Cheever."

Bellow's admiration was returned by John who viewed him as his most gifted contemporary. But while John respected Bellow's writing, he was not above gossiping about the novelist's life, and he would entertain me with extraordinary stories about Bellow's life in Chicago and New York. At the cocktail party he assured me *sotto voce* that Bellow was considering a job at Stanford mainly to get away from his ex-wife in Chicago. As he described the unusual ways this prodigious harridan plagued her ex-husband, I began to wonder for the first time if all of John's suspiciously detailed stories were true.

After dinner our group wandered into the Mirlo lounge which was already filling up with people. John and I grabbed front row seats. I noticed then that Bellow was carrying neither a book nor manuscript. A few minutes before the reading was to begin he walked over to his host, the Director of Residential Education, and said, "I need a copy of *Humboldt's Gift*." The director turned pale. How could he find a copy of a new novel available only in hardcover at the last minute in a freshman dorm? He rushed off to search the audience for a copy. Overhearing the conversation, I ran to my room to re-

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trieve what was probably the only *Humboldt's Gift* within half a mile (and which I possessed only by accident). Just as the director was returning to Bellow after having frantically searched the crowd in vain, I handed him my book. Bellow accepted it without a word.

The hall was now overflowing. Seeing two old women desperately eyeing the packed room, John got up and led them with great panache over to our seats, and we then moved to the floor in front of them. Bellow walked over to us, bent down, and said, "John, you'll pardon me if I make a fool of myself, won't you?" With John's advance absolution, he walked up to the microphones, and began a powerful reading of two long passages from *Humboldt's Gift*. Making almost no introductory comments, he plunged into the heart of the novel. Most of the audience were soon lost, but to those who had read the new book, his fluent reading was intellectually and emotionally dazzling. Or at least the sound of his voice was. The audience could barely see him behind the three large microphones placed to amplify and record the event. John leaned over to me and whispered, "I can hear Saul, but all I see are a shiny pair of reading glasses peeking over the microphones."

Finishing the second passage, Bellow looked up and snapped the book shut. The audience exploded in applause. Smiling stiffly, he quickly walked in front of the microphones and the moment the applause ceased, he held out my book. Since he wasn't looking at me, I didn't immediately realize that this was my signal to fetch the volume, but in a moment I got up and retrieved it. By then people were beginning to walk to the front of the room, but Bellow was too quick for them. As soon as I took the novel from his outstretched hand, he disappeared out the side door, thus ending his visit to Stanford.

On his last day John agreed to sit for an interview to be published in *Sequoia*, the Stanford literary magazine. I drove him up through Stanford's sumptuous "faculty ghetto" to the house of a professor who had generously loaned us his living room. Michael Stillman, who had been recording Bellow and Cheever all week, set up his equipment in the huge glass-walled room which commanded a 120° hilltop view of the

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Stanford campus and nearby foothills. Millicent Dillon, who freelanced at that time for the Stanford News and Publication Service, asked at the last minute to join us and was invited along.

Most of Cheever's published interviews reflect his uneasy and defensive attitude towards critics (among whom he counted interviewers). He often viewed his interlocutor competitively, and his answers were sharp and aggressive. Determined not to be misunderstood, he often rejected, redefined or even ridiculed questions until the embattled interviewer raised concerns he felt deserved a serious response.

By comparison our long afternoon conversation with John was relaxed and amiable. He took an immediate liking to Mike and Millicent. After a few preliminary pleasantries, he leaned back on the large couch and talked for nearly three hours. Much of the conversation eventually appeared in *Sequoia*. John wrote me that he found the printed version "splendid" and claimed that it was the only successful taped interview he had ever done. I suspect he was pleased at the way the interview caught the fanciful quality of his conversation.

The published version of the interview, however, contained only a fraction of the conversation. The editor cut thirty-five single-spaced pages of transcript down to the six published pages, and at least as much interesting material vanished as finally appeared. Some of John's best remarks, however, disappeared by prior agreement. Several times during the interview he told us he was now speaking "off the record." Many of these private remarks concerned his experiences in the Soviet Union, but there were also some devastating appraisals of a few contemporaries. For example, John described one celebrated novelist by saying, "his principal gift was the ability to describe bilgewater, rotting wood, and the smell of wet hemp."

At the end of the interview I drove him back to his room. We talked a few minutes, then Fred arrived. They had to leave for the airport in a few minutes, so we made our quick farewells.

We exchanged a few short letters, and I occasionally saw John at readings after moving to New York in 1977, but I

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never pursued our friendship. The week at Stanford had been a special situation, that one could not repeat. By that time, too, not only had he recouped his critical fortunes with *Falconer*, but he had also achieved a greater public celebrity than ever before. This success made me especially reluctant to presume on his generosity. I felt more comfortable seeing him beaming from the cover of *Newsweek* or chatting with Dick Cavett on television.

The last time I saw John was by accident. In late September 1981 my wife and I went to hear Eudora Welty speak at the Katonah Library. It was a crisp autumn day when the leaves in Westchester were just beginning to turn, the sort of day John so frequently celebrated in his work. Outside the library a long, noisy line of people waited for the doors to open. Walking to the end of the line, we passed Robert Penn Warren, William Maxwell, and, my old teacher, Robert Fitzgerald. Everyone seemed hale and happy. A waterfall of conversations filled the air. Then suddenly I saw John and his wife, Mary, standing quietly near the end of the line. He looked thin, ashen, and painfully frail next to her. When he coughed, he shook with pain. That afternoon he seemed half a century older than the quick, boyish man I had met only six years before. I stopped to say hello, but as we talked, he sounded so tired that I quickly excused myself. After the reading Mary led him gently through the packed room towards the door, and I watched them over the bobbing heads and shoulders of the crowd until his tiny, shuffling frame disappeared into the early evening.

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JESSICA TREADWAY

Frozen

Kat woke up with cotton between her eyeballs and the taste of sand in her mouth, and someone had nailed her skull to the bedpost. "What's the matter with *you*," her sister Sheila said from across the room, where she was clipping purple squares out of construction paper. Kat stood up, not answering, and trembled past her sister to the bathroom. It had been a long, late night.

When she came out, clean and dripping from her shower, she felt better. "I didn't get much sleep, is all," she said to Sheila, patting her hair dry between sides of a towel. She moved closer to Sheila's desk, and bent over to see what her sister was doing.

"They're supposed to be place cards," Sheila said. She pointed to the names scripted carefully across each folded square in black felt marker: Mom, Dad, Kat, Sheila. Richard, Miriam, Grandma, Caroline. Her voice carried something suspicious in it. "If you weren't so hung over, you might remember that I do this *every* Thanksgiving," Sheila said, not snottily, but with a sophistication that did not belong to her.

Kat paused in plucking her jeans from the dresser, and looked away from her sister because she was going to lie. "I wasn't drunk, sweetie," she said, watching bolts of sun lightning explode in front of her eyes. "I love those flowers," she added, pointing to the clumsy daisies bleeding from Sheila's pen. Her sister's disgusted look did not invite her to continue, so she padded out of the bedroom and down the stairs, misbuttoning her sweater.

"Bitch," Kat said, on her way down.

In the kitchen, her mother had put the turkey in the oven and was working on last night's crossword. "There's some juice in the fridge," she told Kat, pressing down on the eraser until some of the squares themselves were almost obliterated. Then she said, "We didn't hear you come in last night."

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Kat sighed and poured a finger of orange juice into her favorite Buffalo Bills glass. She would dump it in the sink when her mother wasn't looking. "It wasn't all that late, Mom," she said. "Besides, I'm a big girl now, remember."

"Well," her mother said. "I guess we know that's true enough, now don't we?" If it hadn't been Thanksgiving she might have said more, but as it was she only shrugged her bathrobe up higher on her shoulders, and set her pencil on the page again. "Four-letter word for a spotted rodent," she murmured, and that was the end of it.

Kat carried her glass into the living room and set it on the window ledge by the front door. Outside it was sunny, blue-skied, even summery, not gray and dismal like every other Thanksgiving she remembered. She hated the morning for its miserable brightness.

"What time are people coming?" she said, squinting hard at the sun.

"Noonish." Her mother paused in the middle of a coffee sip. "Can you think of a word for an Australian tambourine?"

Kat said "No" and moved closer to the window. In the yard, she could see her father collecting frozen pine cones up from the lawn and putting them in a Macy's shopping bag. He was wearing his red–and–black flecked shirt, and he looked like a weird, nervous bird, bobbing in and out around the branches of the tree, stooping to pick up the cones and straightening up again with a darting, nimble swoop. He never knew what to do with the cones once he got them off the ground; he liked to have the yard cleared, but he could never bring himself to throw the cones away. Bags of them lined the garage wall in worthless symmetry. Now, stopping to arch his back, with his hand on his spine, her father caught sight of her standing in the window. He hesitated for a moment, then nodded to greet her gaze. Kat put her hands up to the cold glass and pressed hard. The moons of her fingertips turned bloodless as a baby's, and she thought she might fall through.

Her grandmother was the first to arrive, bearing pies made of pumpkin and mincemeat. "I don't know why I don't just use the canned filling like everybody else in the world," she

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said, as Kat's mother lifted the wax paper covering to take an admiring whiff. "Cutting up that pumpkin and scooping out those strings—I don't think I can stand it another year." It was the same thing she said every Thanksgiving.

Sheila was in the dining room, arranging flowers for the middle of the table. Kat and her grandmother settled in the living room on opposite ends of the couch, and Kat's father came in and began to build a fire, tossing logs across the hearth in his careful, measured way. "Don't let that sun fool you," he said, to no one in particular. "It's cold out there." When he went to look for matches, Kat was unexpectedly left alone with her grandmother, and they looked at each other by mistake as both raised their eyes to the clock.

"Well," her grandmother said, as if this chance contact were a commitment to speak. "I know we're not supposed to talk about it around here, but that baby's got a birthday coming up soon, isn't that right?" She was working a needle up and down on a patch of cloth, and Kat saw she was filling in the design of a clown with buck teeth and a red flower-nose. A Christmas gift for Caroline, Kat supposed.

"Mmm," she said, meaning yes, although she had never thought of it exactly that way—as a birthday.

"I thought so," her grandmother said. She stopped sewing and looked over the top of her eyeglasses at Kat. "I never told you this, but all that time you were in the hospital, I was praying that baby would survive. Even when they said it looked so bad, with the breathing trouble, I prayed it wouldn't die and leave you with nothing to remember. I still don't believe a granddaughter of mine went out and got herself in the condition you did, and goodness knows I never hear the end of it at the Patchwork Circle, but nobody deserves their baby to die." She leaned back over her pattern and mumbled, further, "And you only seventeen."

"Eighteen, now," Kat said, but her grandmother didn't hear her. Kat got up and went into the pantry, shut the door behind her and poured vodka in her orange juice. She had no use for God, although she was intrigued by the calm that came into her grandmother's eyes when she talked about church and prayer. Her grandmother had said it was a miracle the baby ended up living, in spite of what the doctors

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had said, and at first Kat had thought she might be right. But then it came to her that certain things just happened, and they had nothing to do with God. Maybe her baby was meant to grow up and become a president, or a scientist, or a famous opera singer; who could tell? She was not good at anticipating. She only wished she were as sure as her grandmother that it was a blessing the baby didn't die. Dead haunting things were not as scary as those that stayed alive, she was beginning to believe.

The baby was a girl. She had wanted to call her Katherine after herself, but the foster parents had renamed her Joanna, after the doctor who had finger-pressed the little blue chest to finally save her life. That much Kat had been able to find out from the file at the adoption agency, by reading upside-down when the woman at the desk wasn't watching. She looked it up in a Name-the-Baby book at the library: Joanna meant "God's gracious gift." There it was again. She looked up Katherine. It meant *pure*. Showed how much they knew. The foster parents were going to adopt the baby and move to another city. Kat didn't know their name, and standing in the pantry she wondered for a minute about where her baby would grow up, until she remembered that it didn't matter to her. She stepped back into the kitchen, and her mother was looking at her with narrow eyes. "I just hope that's plain orange juice you're drinking," she said. "Your father and I have been pretty forgiving lately and looked the other way, but if you get drunk today, you'll ruin things for everybody." She had changed from her robe into a sweater and skirt, and she smelled of Wind Song perfume as Kat passed by. She had put her hair up in a barrette shaped like an ear of Indian corn.

"*Okay*, Mom," Kat said, taking another sip, and then so her mother couldn't hear her she whispered "Jesus." She went back into the living room, and without even consulting her grandmother she turned on the TV.

"Wait—this isn't the best parade," Sheila protested, coming into the room and reaching for the *TV Guide*. "The Channel Ten one has Michael Jackson doing 'Beat It' on a float with the Muppets. I saw a preview on PM Magazine."

"Don't you know anything?" Kat said. She was irritated because her drink was almost gone, and because her mother

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had caught her again. "Nobody really sings on those things. The stars are only mouthing the words, and somebody plays a record behind the floats, or something. And I bet it's only a look-a-like, not really Michael Jackson, even."

"Oh," Sheila said, after a moment. "Well, I don't care." But she let the *TV Guide* fall on the floor, and went back into the dining room to fiddle with the centerpiece.

Her grandmother wrapped a piece of thread around her fingers, and pulled so tightly it snapped. "Do you always have to be such a spoilsport?" she said to Kat, tying off a knot.

The night before, she had gone out with Duncan and Tony and Steve, to celebrate the Thanksgiving vacation. "Holidays are always the best excuse to get wasted," Duncan had said, opening a bottle of Bully Hill and taking the first slug. "I mean, we can't ignore an American tradition." They were drinking in the back of Duncan's van because Kat was under age, and besides, bars were too expensive and too loud. They preferred their own company to anyone else's, anyway. All through high school they had gotten to know each other like family, all five of them—Tom was the only one missing now—and they were more comfortable than siblings. "I think the last time we did this was the night of graduation," Duncan added. They were all a year ahead of Kat, in jobs or college now, and they had not had a reunion since that celebration in summer.

Kat got the bottle last and, taking a wet swallow, closed her eyes as the wine went down warm and sour. She leaned back on the pillow she'd given Duncan two Christmases ago: it was an orange and purple rectangle, and on the corduroy cover she had embroidered, clumsily, "The Foodmobile Rides Again," because he always kept boxes of glazed doughnuts and Hershey's kisses under the front seat, for when they got the munchies. He'd said it was the best present he'd gotten, next to a pipe his sister had bought him at a dress shop in Provincetown. For Kat's present he'd given her Pat Benatar's *Crimes of Passion*.

None of them had ever asked her anything directly about the baby before, but as they sat there in the van, the windows black with night and *Running on Empty* playing over and over,

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the birth now more history than truth and the wine in their bodies like boldness inhaled, she felt their questions and knew Steve would be the one to voice them. "You don't have to talk about it if you don't want to, Kat," he told her, and knowing what was coming she put her hand out for the bottle and somebody passed it to her. "But that couldn't be true, what my sister heard from Vicky Vernetti, was it? That your parents didn't know you were—*you* know—until it was almost born? I mean, my mother says she can tell when my sister just has the curse, by looking at her."

"Well, I guess mine never looked," Kat said, and laughed loudly, as if she had made a joke. But she saw that they were serious, and to make them feel better she said, "Vicky Vernetti is a lying slut." She was surprised they had even asked the question, because she thought they knew her well enough to answer it for themselves. It was true. She had always been able to keep her own secrets.

"Tom knew all along," she told Steve. "That's why he went away. Has anybody heard from him?" They all shook their heads, and Kat felt her hopes thud. "Me either," she said. "He probably has some new chick at school. He's probably forgotten everything about us." But this sounded like someone else talking, so she shut up and settled back into the pillow. "There must be another bottle around here somewhere," she said, letting the empty one roll under the seat.

Later, she moved closer to Duncan and laid her head on his chest, and then put her face up to his, to kiss him. She had never let him or Steve or Tony do anything more, because that was just for Tom, but at those times when she needed to be close to someone she turned to one of the others; they understood her and it was good, they were together for a while and she felt something, instead of feeling nothing. And now she needed it and she was willing to give; she didn't care that it was not Tom; what was there left to save? But Duncan pulled his face away, and reached down awkwardly to touch her hair instead.

"Kat," he said quietly. "I don't—we can't. It's different, now." He smelled of the wine but his voice was sober, and lifting her head Kat saw in his eyes that it *was* different, and she could not imagine how stupid she had been, to think that it would ever be the same, that they could ever understand

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her. She sat up and they pulled away from each other, and she was alone again.

Duncan had moved to the front of the van to change the tape. He put on the song called "Rosanna," which was one of Kat's favorites, and she began to sing along with it, losing herself dizzily in the beat. Tony and Steve, who were sprawled across the carpet, woke up and finished the last of the third bottle. "Hey," Tony said, watching Kat move her head to the music. "Rosanna. Isn't that the little bastard's name?" He ducked as Duncan threw the Foodmobile pillow at him, then stuck the pillow under his elbow and leaned against his fist. "Sorry," he said to Kat, but Kat saw he was not sorry at all.

She got up suddenly, and their faces came rushing at her and then beyond her, to a place she couldn't see. "Joanna," she said, and the name felt like cleanser in her soiled mouth. Then she told them, the words lingering unfamiliar in her ears, "I want to go home now."

By the time Richard and Miriam came, carrying Caroline between them in a baby seat, Kat was well into her fourth screwdriver, and feeling much better. As they burst into the house with blankets and diaper bags and rattles spilling onto the floor, she went into the kitchen with the rest of the family to greet them, feeling almost happy. "Look at this little *doll*," Kat's mother said in a baby voice, rubbing a finger across Caroline's cheek. She stuck her face out to kiss Richard, and put a hand on Miriam's shoulder as Miriam carried the baby to the kitchen counter and set down the seat. Richard and Miriam lived in Virginia, and this was the first time any of them had seen Caroline, who was almost five months old. Everybody crowded around—like idiots, Kat thought, but she did not want to leave—to look at the little face in the pink snowsuit hood. "She looks just like both of you," Kat's mother said, inaccurately but with pride. Kat saw Richard and Miriam look at each other and smile.

"Well, bring her in here and let her watch a parade," Kat's grandmother ordered, hiding her needlepoint clown behind the microwave. "Put her down there, and let's see what she can do."

"I bet she can't *do* much," Sheila whispered to Kat, as they

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followed their grandmother into the living room. "I bet all she ever does is spit up." Kat was about to add something crude, but then she realized Sheila had forgiven her for the Michael Jackson crack, so all she did was nod and answer, "I bet you're right." They sat in front of the fire to shield the baby from the spitting sparks, and she finished her latest drink and set the glass down, and watched as Miriam undid all the pink clothing and pulled Caroline out and held her in her lap.

"She sleeps through the night all the time now," Richard announced. He put his hand on Miriam's knee and leaned over to push his nose into Caroline's. Watching them, Kat thought about how awkward it had been when her brother had first started going out with Miriam, because she was Jewish, and because she was different in a way that had nothing to do with her Jewishness. She was feisty, forthright and passionate; she was a hugger, coming into a family that seldom hugged, and she did not hesitate to yell when she was angry, or cry when she was hurt. It had been four years since Miriam had married Richard, and Kat still felt she did not know her sister-in-law, although she was jealous of the way Miriam had come to be known by the rest of the family. Even her grandmother had stopped referring to her as "the Jew girl" and last year, for Hanukkah, she'd sent Miriam an embroidered six-point star.

"So what's the verdict?" Richard said to his parents, as they leaned forward on the couch to look down on the baby. Kat's father had gotten his camera out, and was sticking it in Caroline's face. Sheila was trying to make the baby laugh, by waggling her tongue in the air behind her father's head.

"Not bad for your first shot at a granddaughter, is she?" Richard said.

The camera came down suddenly and at the same time Miriam moved to put an elbow in Richard's side, but it was too late. Kat felt them all looking at her, but trying not to, and she felt her face get hot as she stood up and almost fell on top of Caroline. "Wait—I didn't *mean* anything," Richard said, as she stumbled out of the room. In the kitchen she put an arm out to steady herself against the wall, and heard Richard apologizing.

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"We just don't talk about it," her father said, his voice a distant mumble.

Miriam came into the kitchen and watched as Kat poured straight vodka into the bottle's cap, and drank it off. "Well, that's helpful," Miriam said. "I'm glad you've found a constructive way to deal with all of this."

"Shut up," Kat told her. "Would you leave me alone?"

"Everybody leaves you alone," Miriam said. "I just don't happen to feel like it." She picked up a wet cloth from the sink to sponge off the place on her sleeve where Caroline had dribbled. "Listen. Do you want to get out of here for a while? Come skating with me and Sheila?"

"Skating?" Kat said, dully.

"Sheila checked out the ice earlier. She says you guys used to go every Thanksgiving, when you were little. And we have plenty of time before dinner, because the brat has to have her nap." Miriam moved cautiously toward Kat and took the bottle out of her hand. "Come on. It'll work up your appetite."

"Okay," Kat said, because it took too much effort to say no.

"Be careful," her mother called after them, when they had put Caroline to sleep and rounded up skates and sweaters from the winter storage pile. As she walked behind Sheila and Miriam, it occurred to Kat that in the whole of her lifetime, she must have heard her mother say the same thing a thousand times before.

It was called Hunter's Pond, after the family who lived closest to it, down the street and around the corner from Kat and Sheila's house. On the way, Kat stayed behind Sheila and Miriam, trying to concentrate on the white ice slicks under her feet, hoping that if she fell she would have the sensibility enough to put her hands out to break it. She knew she was drunk. The cold air crackling in her nostrils helped a little, but when it came right down to it she could feel her head swaying as she walked, and every once in a while Miriam would turn to look over her shoulder to make sure she was behaving, as if Kat were a puppy unleashed in a new neighborhood.

Usually there were dozens of kids stumbling around on the pond's smooth circle, but today the only people stringing on

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their skates when the three of them arrived were Sybil Thorndike, who was five, and her little sister Lizzie. Lizzie was struggling to put on her double-runners, and to entertain her Sybil was teaching her a song. "Oh Mickey, you're so fine, you're so fine you blow my mind, hey Mickey! Hey Mickey!" Sybil was singing, as she swiveled her hips back and forth, holding one skated toe in the ice as a pivot. Following Sheila and Miriam to the bench next to the kids, Kat saw Miriam smiling at Sybil's gyrations and her seductive, husky-sweet voice.

"When I was that age, the sexiest we got was 'I'm a Little Teapot,' " Miriam said.

Kat sat down and managed to get her skates on, surprised but grateful that her toes weren't cold even when she set her sock feet briefly on the ice to unknot the laces. She pulled them tight at the top, over her ankles, and stood up at the edge of the ice. Sheila and Miriam had already pushed off and were making a slow circle, huddling close and occasionally grabbing at each other's arms to keep from falling. Kat skated over behind them and listened to what they were saying.

"Are my ankles bending in?" she heard Miriam ask Sheila.

"No. And anyway, so are mine."

"You guys are doing great," Kat called ahead to them, feeling suddenly generous and light-hearted. She had not been skating in years, and had forgotten what it felt like to be on the ice, gliding, moving so easily so fast and not even having to think about how it was happening. Her head was still congested with the effects of the vodka, but the air moving against her face, and the little chips of ice that came up and landed in her hair, made her feel energetic and invincible. She fell in beside them and heard blades clicking on the ice behind her.

"Baby, you can drive my car," Sybil Thorndike chanted to imaginary music, pulling her sister along by the mitten thumbs and sticking out her fanny. "And baby, I love you."

"She's cute," Miriam said. "A little tease though, I bet."

"All anybody ever talks about anymore is sex, sex, *sex*," Sheila said abruptly, slowing down and turning awkwardly to face them. "I can't believe it. Yesterday Audrey Forman said

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her mother was getting her the Pill, and last week, I heard, this girl in *fifth* grade had to leave school to have a baby."

"God," Miriam said.

"Do we have to talk about this?" Kat felt a swing of nausea, and put a mittened palm on her stomach to quell it.

"Why not?" Miriam asked.

"I want to," Sheila said.

"Well, I don't." Kat speeded up to pull ahead of them, digging her skates hard into the ice. Coming to a corner of the pond, she let one foot lead the other and tried to turn into a backward loop, but her blades caught on something and she fell, landing in the wet snowbank at the ice's edge. Sheila and Miriam came over and helped to pull her up.

"That's what you get for drinking," Sheila said.

Miriam brushed off the back of Kat's jacket. "Richard told me you used to be good," she said.

"What?"

"A good skater. Richard says you used to be the one everybody watched, to learn how to do it."

"I *am* good." Kat shrugged out of Miriam's hold and almost fell again, but managed to stay up, although she could feel herself tottering. "Watch this, if you don't believe me." She was annoyed by Miriam's doubts and Sheila's accusations, and spinning away from them she wanted to put as much distance behind her as she could. She took it easily down the stretch of the pond's length, then did a slow but accurate turn at the other end and began to move toward them again, picking up her speed. Ahead of her she could see them standing together clumsily, their arms hooked for support.

"Just stay right there," Kat yelled, nearing the middle of the pond. "Nobody move, and I'll stop right in front of you." She remembered how, as a kid, she used to play this game with Sheila, skating up to where her sister stood and at the last minute shifting her weight so that her skates turned to the side, halting her in a scrape of flying ice flakes. No one had ever done it as well as she did, approaching so fast and stopping so suddenly, so close. It got so Sheila didn't even flinch as Kat neared her, she trusted it that much. Now Kat picked up her pace, coming over to where the two of them were standing.

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"Wait!" Sheila cried, and Kat realized, too late and with a sickening rise in her throat, that she was out of control. She tried to stop, but then she was pitching forward into the ice, into her sister, and her blades were tearing at soft red flesh. Sheila's screams seemed to be coming from Kat herself. She felt their ache hard in her chest. Then she prayed to pass out in the cold silence of the snow, but something even colder inside kept her awake and shuddering.

At the hospital, Kat sat with Miriam and her mother as they waited for the doctor to come out of the examining room. Her mother turned her head away when Kat offered her a cup of coffee from the machine. "It's not enough to make yourself miserable, is it?" she said, keeping her voice low so no one else in the waiting room could hear. "You always have to put the rest of us through it, too." Kat drank the coffee herself. They were close enough that they could hear Sheila whimpering in the next room, and when she heard her sister shriek once in pain, with a short but violent outburst, Kat got up from the lounge couch, went into the ladies' room, and threw up. Then, still gripping the edges of the toilet bowl, she began to cry. It was an act she had imagined many times during the past year, but she had always held back at the last minute as if, once started, she would never be able to give it up. But now it came easily, with a comfort she had not anticipated. When she felt strong enough she stood up and stepped out of the stall to rinse her face off, then bent over to let fresh, quieter tears fall into the sink. She was no longer drunk, but now that didn't seem to matter.

After a while Miriam came in, and found her leaning against the wall. "Are you all right?" she said.

"Me?" Kat looked at her with surprise. "I'm not the one who got the skate in the eye. I'm not the one you should be asking." She looked in the mirror and saw a swollen, flush-red face. It was just the way she had looked after the baby was born, spent with effort in the aftermath of panic. Then she had not recognized herself in the glass above the delivery room, but now the shaken, guilty face was becoming a familiar one, and she hated it.

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"I'm just bad," she said to Miriam. "I always have been."

"Are you sure?" Miriam's face was serious, but her voice was at once amused and doubtful, as if Kat had announced she wanted to become a nun.

"Yes," Kat said. Against the stark whiteness of the sterile walls, the word was a distant echo. "Just ask anyone who knows me."

When they got home, Kat's father and Richard had arranged a place for Sheila on the couch in the living room, with pillows propped up and the blanket from her bed over the cushions. She had a thick white bandage over her eye, and her face was puffy where they had taken stitches, but the doctor had told them she would be back to normal in a few weeks, with only a trace of a scar. Her eyesight had been saved completely. Kat tried to apologize to her sister as they walked her out to the car from the hospital, but Sheila waved away her efforts and even managed to smile with the undamaged side of her face. "It was an accident," she told Kat firmly.

Their grandmother had kept the food going, and was bustling around the kitchen talking to herself. She fixed a plate for Sheila before the others sat down, but Sheila said she didn't want any. Instead, she asked Miriam if she could hold Caroline during the dinner.

"That way I won't be the only outcast," she said, and Miriam brought her the baby, fresh from her nap and bundled in a dry pink sleepsuit.

"I have to get a shot of this," Richard said, anxious to restore the holiday. He picked up their father's camera. "We'll caption it, 'What Some People Will Do Just to Get Out of Family Dinners.' " The shutter clicked, and Caroline reached out her fat arms toward her father in a query of joy.

In the dining room, Kat's mother was pouring wine. "Don't think you're going to get any of this," she said to Kat, who had come up close behind her.

"I *know*," Kat said. "Don't you think I know? I'll get myself some grape juice."

"Well," her mother answered doubtfully, replacing the cork. "Good, I guess."

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"Are we ready?" Kat's grandmother was pouring gravy into a bowl. "I need some help with this food, so get yourselves all out here." They went into the kitchen and picked up dishes and trays, and carried them out to the table. "Be careful of that cranberry sauce, it's sliding," her grandmother instructed. "Watch the stuffing, it's spilling over the sides." But finally all the food had been transported, and they set about finding the place cards Sheila had arranged earlier in the morning.

"Hey, nice job on the names," Miriam called to Sheila, when they were all seated.

"I know," Sheila called back. "Thanks." Kat could see her sister through the living room doorway, making Caroline's hands do patty-cake. The light from the window bounced off Sheila's bandage and made it a part of her face, as if the eye itself had swelled in size and power.

Her grandmother put her hands together. "Well, who's going to say the blessing?" she demanded. It was usually Sheila's job.

Kat looked up. Her mother was lifting lint from the tablecloth. Her father stood in his place behind the turkey, staring vacantly down at the platter, his carving knife poised at the leg joint in stagnant fingers. Richard and Miriam touched hands, and on the other side of the table Kat felt the quick tremble of memory at what this had been like; what it had been to reach for somebody and know he would reach back; what it had meant to be held for once and not let go too early.

"Let me," she rushed to offer, and as the faces of her family bent over their meal and a baby sang in the silence, she tried to remember a grace from her childhood.

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DANIEL HOFFMAN

Essay on Style

Announced himself Autocrat of all.
All he could grab was his,
Astonishment also. He invoked the
Abecedary of his affections.
Articulation became the purpose of all his study.
Arcana he resurrected and put to uses only
Adepts could recognize, yet everyone must
Acknowledge his originality, if not his power, his charm.

But by then he'd become
Bored and decided that he'd
Begin again, this time by
Boring from within
But found the behests he would turn on themselves
Already contained their own
Abnegations so he cut that out and soon
Began again: The problem was to find what
Belonged to anyone but had not yet
Been recognized. What to do? He
Brandished bucolics as his own invention, juxtaposed to the
Barbarous in bold combinations;
Banishment from joy he
Broadcasts as the soul's estate until he
Bequeaths it joy. Blood spurts with the heart-
Beat of his declamations! What he
Borrows becomes his estate. He
Bewilders the uninitiate with his bounty,
Beggaring most of his imitators.

But he
Concluded at last he would
Close out this line of
Bagatelles, tired ballads, the old

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Bardic strut.
Accomplishment demanded something else, like
Allegory, for starters, or
Archetypes, but they'd been done. He'd settle,
Certain of his rightness, for his own
Caprices and therefore preached
Canons of celebration,
Cloudy yet coherent, a cryptic
Concord that subsumed condemnations.
Chorales of his made cunning
Contact with much of the universe.
Crooked, contrary, and cruel are his captives,
Coral and chrysoprase among his colors. The
Curious have enhanced his reputation.

Dull did he find this in time, though,
Daring to demand then a
Deckchair in which to do his own dreams.
Almost all of the chairs were
Bulging with
Characters whose names in
Any old order
Began to comprise a
Convention of the Great, the Nearly-Great, the not-so-great, the
Copiers and carboncopiers of copies,
Anthologizers, neologizers, those who
Breathed, gasped, howled, sang, stuttered in
Committees, many of them hung up on forms of
Address long familiar, others
Adept at arcana no longer arcane or
Borrowers bringing together their
Cracked reproductions of chunks of the
Chaos as though imitation
Comprised creation—His restless
Daemon declares independence from that lot.
Dictates from the deity within him, his
Destiny, directs that he now
Discover the drift of his difference. What in these

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Days of disjunction endures? A
Diction to say
Desire, dawn, death, despair, descant,
Direct disclosures in dextrous dirges,
Devour, depart, dig, digress, discard and discord
—Doggone, it's a domain here a man can
Do or die in, go
Daft with the delicacy and the daring, the
Dazzle of dew in the darkness—let his
Doodlings disclose new delights, for this dialect
Defies desolation.
Eager, explores that
Elysian empire where
Entire concatenations of vocables,
English, will do his bidding in
Fables, in phrases, in forms and
Felicitous figures, as long as that grand
Gaulimaufry the Lexicon bids all his doings. But
How can this or any part of this
Happen unless
He has enticed
Her, his heedless
Headstrong Muse?
He will seek till he finds her,
He will climb over ledges of syntactical terrain,
Hacking through thickets of thought,
He'll grope past the dolmens of his despair till
He comes, at the summit, to her
Hostel of all delights. With
Her by his side, with
Her blessing, he'll
Hover, he'll swoop, and soar
Hang-gliding from Helicon, over the world.

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JENNIFER REGAN

The Glass Eye

In the cloakroom, carrots
Limp as sleeping fingers
Nested in damp brown bags
With Wonder Bread and hardboiled eggs.
When we peeled away the shells
A rich stink mixed with our smell.
Boys joked about who done it
(Elbows in ribs, squeals
From girls sprouting breasts)
And who painted Our Principal Uber Alles
On the village water tower.
Girls showed off pencilpoint tattoos
Of boys' names—Barry, Ted—
And horses—Flame, and Flying Dream.
The boy who'd had polio leaned
Among the coats, took out
His glass eye and polished it
With spit. We rolled its hard stare
On our palms, passing it from hand to hand,
Blind as an egg yolk,
Round as the world itself.

December, 1944

The last bus from Buffalo,
Stuffed with businessmen
And women home from shopping
Roared to a stop at the Four Corners.
In Brown's Drug Store we pressed

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Against the glass, looking
For Dad's felt hat. Lights
Of the city shone far-off
Through falling snow and factory smoke.
What did he do in an office
With Marion, who Mother said
Was much too pretty to be smart?
The way she said it made words
Like "divorce" and other things
They did in the city buzz in the dark
Like bugs you couldn't catch.
Marion wore green snakeskin shoes.
She answered the phone with a voice
Like Helen Trent on the radio
("Can a woman over 35 . . . ?")
Dad stepped from the bus,
His eyes searching the sidewalk.
We pushed out the door
And, catching the packages from his arms,
Rushed him towards the Ford
Where Mother had the motor running.
She drove in silence, tirechains
Thumping like a heart on the snow.

Growing Up in the Good Old Days of Radio

Lamont Cranston moved in and out
Of the headlights beamed around the walls
The Shadow knows what evil lurks
Under the covers
What sweet fruit
And I rode obedient as Silver,
Singing with guilt. Tonto
Was just my size in the orange eye

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Of the Motorola dial.
Through the crack in the door to the hall
Came Jack, Doc and Reggie, guns cocked,
And I took them one by one
Or they took me. Mother found me
Tangled in the sheets, the radio playing
The last notes of *Valse Triste*.

Chorus

Those characters the Greeks used,
Mostly women, moving on and off stage
Mourning the hero's fate

Have moved into the elms
Planted with our city
To shade with leafy arcades
The glare of men's business.

Wind is their cue.
They sway and moan,
Waving their arms,
Scratching at windows.

Through a riddle of branches
You can see streets
Running off in all directions
And at the edge, the great, restless lake.

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JOHN HOLLOWAY

The Hermit Gets to the Heart of It

Some sombre steadiness is what I hear
below me as I cannot sleep in bed.
Right through the darkness. It seems so near,
I could imagine it was in my head,
Thudding and pulsing through the wakeful night
now there, now gone—all through till morning light.

Nothing lives in this place, not even a mouse,
except for me . . . well, yes, there may be some
spiders or sizeless mites about the house,
but small creatures like that are quite dumb
for human ears: yet I cannot sleep
for that steady drum—sustained, solemn, deep.

The days pass, and the lonelier I grow,
wandering about from silent room to room,
the clearer, in my head, I hear that slow
boom, as I lie: the regular deep boom
that comes up from below to fill my ear,
but leaves me full of loneliness, not fear.

That Other One could help me if he would:
why does he play so secretive a part?
How can he leave me hopeless, when he could
easily make all come right, if he had a heart
that beat as mine does? Yes, but I am weak
and he, he must be strong—yet, cannot speak.

Is he not there at all? Am I alone
in the blank rooms? And when I try to sleep,
and hear the ponderous, recurrent tone
sound in my ear and seem to rise from deep
below, have I myself what can repeat,
endless as life itself, that steady beat?

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Remember

What good luck . . . it is as if we were
centuries old. Like the middle
of a green tree. Yes, you say, and what
is that called? . . . heartwood.
And I lay that to heart.

Sometimes I think we live in
those houses of mammoth bones; or beside
the bison drawings in the Cave; but I hear
the lisp of paper as, quietly, you turn
a page; and know you are reading.

Silence enfolded like a rain forest
also Robinson Crusoe. But he had no dog . . .
Nor did the pure Cathars, on the wet
skerries, the sea enfolding them
but never in silence.

Thus we make, I suppose, such
Old People . . . before time. A fire
of wood. The Adams (both of them)
must have lit one like it, the first
winter out of Paradise

which however it is easy to think
they took with them. The log
burns brightly, seasoned as it is
and as we are; and as you reminded me
of the name of the core of it.

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An Old Master

They say, in the next valley, the ruined school
    has stone the colour of storm; with rain
through roof often, or rusted, jammed casement.

That village empty now; but the old master
    still whistles his way about the schoolhouse.
The birds mimic him. Listen to his laughter

sane as a pebble. He cooks well, still
    calmly reads his learned books,
plays his violin; everything in the house

spotless and in its chosen place. Travellers
    crossing the great moors from there
to here, tell the tale of the ruined village

and man at peace. Then they ask, How can
    happiness lie in ruins? Ah,
        a Good Question.

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Non-Event

In the north of the country, beyond the last hills
before the sea, stranger things have happened.
Dogs cringe suddenly in the open field.
Sometimes, the moon startles the glum birds.
No cloud, sudden shadow; wails in the air.

He met him on an upland road. He said,
a bad day. Better turn back, stranger . . .
things have happened. Hadn't they met, and parted,
before, some other way? He turned away,
not bidding him goodbye. Nor he, him.

Some clown . . . It got dark. When the day darkens,
the handbooks advise you to tune in to the light—
to the Northern Lights. Start the fan, keep up
the talk, or appearances. But he didn't. He walked on
in silence. Wasn't even whistling plainsong

or thinking about cold or bold fronts, or
anything else that reverses the direction of a variable
barometer. And nothing whatever happened except
a moon-faced moon rose, clownishly, and grinned,
and got hid in a cloud. Which only goes to show.

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JAY PARINI

The Visitors

Our children sleep among the stars:
blunt, bodiless, unnamed.
The music of their sphere is one long vowel.
None has been signaled from the ground by us,
at least not yet.
Mere argument will never bring them down,
since accidental entry is their mode,
a rupture into flesh,
the starlight overhead past recollection.
Their going will be difficult as well:
a disremembering, consonants disowned.
That change will hurt like every other change.
Only in the spring,
when new grass skims a sudden world,
will any of them understand our need,
our wishing we could hold them,
say their names and set them down.

Stroup Pond: a Close-Up

This place has a placid look, but only from the road.
Up close, a haze of gnats drifts just above the surface;
blue-tailed dragonflies assemble, swarms of lilies
that appear to float rootlessly in air. If you
should swim here, you'll see that night blooms underwater:
turtles drowse, and guppies nibble their eclectic meals,
as waterbugs descend on silent strings to mud
where anything collects—white wicker bones, a bottle
with a message corked inside (perhaps for you), a lost

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gold ring that once belonged to someone you might know
or claim as kin. There's more here than you need,
but what about that skein of gristle in the rocks?
Back off, if you're afraid or hate strange smells.
Beyond the road you'll never notice, nor will you deplore,
the slaughter in the reeds: the lizard's jaw, the snake's
hot lunch, the swift's eccentric pattern as it feeds.

For My Wife at Washing

in Torre Gentile

She whistles in the patch below:
my wife beside the antique village tubs
fed by a stream of fresh hill water.
Out of sight, with long hair dipping forward
as she works and whistles to herself,
she washes in my mind's reflective eye,
a Philomela lately given tongue.

She doesn't know I'm standing here
behind a limestone wall, above her on the road,
nor that I'm whistling to myself as well,
her song in my own time,
a baseline harmony she'll never hear.
Loose water runs *scherzando* underground and suds
against the tub, our effervescent clothes.

Sweet bride of summer,
how can I pretend this world won't fail us,
fields red-ripened by Italian suns,
the porous ground that holds and weaves
each braided stream? Though thicker walls
come hard between us, keep this clear song,
whistle it for me.

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JARED CARTER

Blueprints

Think of snapping on the overhead light,
of unrolling them across the work table—
the cold, heavy pages with their edges
that can cut clean, a thick scroll of them

held down by ashtrays, bars of scrap iron.
What emerges first, what wells up, is not
the world reversed, with the sky dark
and the building made of light, but nothing—

a vast blue field of nothing at all, page
after page of it wavering and curling
and flexing and finally becoming still.
Something rises out of that darkness,

girders join, bricks fall into place,
walls are borne up on a scaffolding
of lines and arrows, each floor catches
and holds in a wind of light blowing

through the rooms: doors swing open
in perfect semicircles, the secrets
of ducts and conduits stand revealed.
But it is still a world turned inside out

by numbers, its skeleton shown again
and again, from all angles, made negative
so that eventually it might be made real.
And even the blue of the heavy paper,

that is mottled and grainy and empty,
is fading each time you examine it
under the overhead lamp, whitening
from exposure, gradually changing

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to what it is not. And if accidentally left
on the table till morning, erases itself,
like the plan becoming the building,
glowing and brightening into nothing.

PATRICIA CLAIRE PETERS

Letter from Harry

Was able to get away
Last week on a solitary
Two day fishing trip and

What a time I had!
Saw an otter and watched
For about thirty minutes while it
Swam not the least concerned

For me sitting twenty feet away,
Across the stream, it actually
Caught a bluegill, sat there
Eating it, beginning with the

Head and I thought how
Different from a cat who will
Generally leave the head behind.

And then in the dawn fog I
Heard the small scatter of stones,
Four deer, one a fawn, trying
To cross the stream which

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Was too deep so they
Walked upstream to a spot where
They finally crossed and
Vanished into the woods.

They too did not seem aware of
Me though again I was quite
Close and standing in the stream.

I swear I'm becoming
A mystic where nature is
Concerned, beginning to feel

It is showing to me alone
Some of its secrets. Things
Have a way of just being

There when I'm alone in
The woods, or by water.
I must be taking on

The coloration and smell of
Things in there, in a word,
Beginning to fit in the

Way Indians used to,
Becoming the deer
And the otter as I wear

Their skins, a great blue heron
Feather in my hat.

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MARITA GARIN

Dissolution

Late afternoon, and cicadas in oak
beside the pond are loud,
sounds rising and subsiding
around the old veterans in their chairs,
their bedcoats slack
in August heat.
As the path
shifts from sun, as the ground
darkens where insects
have emerged, leaving the earth
riddled as though by bullets,
discarded hulls can yet be seen
attached to bark. Split
by the prepared new life as it struggled
to be released.
And these sounds
which slip through the silken hands
and mouths of leaves, summoning
these men who rest. Listen
to the dry buzz, how relentless
its pulse—
so methodical
it could be gunfire,
they could be back in their foxholes
while beyond them
a terrible silence closes over
their buddies in fields.

But that was years ago. No one
returns willingly
to grief even though it wants
to be grasped.

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Why else would it
trouble their dreams,
moving through the body again
the way this unsteady wind, its heart
gone, searches through the ribs
of these empty chairs.

Watch it cross the pond to a high bank
where weeds cannot resist
its pull. Their flowers
against the pale consolidated clouds
of evening are black.
Until the stars
appear, for hours their brilliance
steadily perforating
the sky's fabric. Look how detached
they are from the human scene.

Taken Near the Jocko River, Montana—1932

They stand together, unchanged, not now
but then, in a clearing
beside the river while their horses
graze nearby. Both wear jodhpurs
and boots. Having drawn apart,
they still clasp
each other's waist, fastened
like halves of a hinged shell
in a moment so private
and faded it appears to be
twilight except that this
is a beginning—my parents, a few months
before marriage, before the assault

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of years and children and only a river
is rushing past in this dream
where they see no tragedy
in the multiple arms of dark spruce
held out to retrieve them
nor in sunlight as it sheers
away from water with such blinding
clarity they believe the river
has stopped, they will be here forever.

There is poetry here

Brook Farm Inn
15 Hawthorne Street
Lenox, MA 01240
413-637-3013

A Bed and Breakfast

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MARCIA B. SIEGEL

Acrobatics of God

THE FRONTISPIECE IN THE FASCINATING, BAFFLING 1973 volume of Martha Graham's *Notebooks* is a closeup photo of the choreographer. Partly shadowed by a piece of cloth she's drawing over her head, she gazes down and inward with a strange serenity that overrides the tension you see in a cord of her neck and the fist clenched in front of her breastbone. In the entire three-week spring season the Graham company gave at City Center, not a vestige of that luminous complexity and self-absorption was to be seen. It seems the inner sources that brought Martha Graham's dance into being have been directed increasingly outward. The company style has hardened around the organic matter of the repertory like some bright enamel shell. Graham dance now is about as much like an egg as a Fabergé bauble.

I've thought a few times in recent years that Graham was reverting to her earliest dance environment, the pageantry and glitz of Denishawn, and I wasn't entirely surprised when she decided to revive three vignettes from this prehistoric era in modern dance. But the so-called Denishawn/Graham Solos turned out to be a miscellany, hard to comprehend as anything but dabblings in the more sensational realms of the past.

The five pieces have almost nothing in common except that they're all very brief, under ten minutes long. They represent five extremely different approaches to non-academic dance. Ruth St. Denis' *The Incense* (1906) inaugurated an extraordinary career of spiritualism combined with sensuality, and St. Denis performed it affectingly into her seventies. *Serenata Morisca* (1916) was originally set by Ted Shawn as a Denishawn classroom exercise and later incorporated into the touring repertory. Graham danced it in Denishawn's vaudeville appearances and later as an independent "act" in the Greenwich Village Follies. She made *Tanagra* in 1926 for her own first New York concert, when she and the dance were still tinged with Denishawn prettiness. *Lamentation* (1930) comes from her severest period, and by *Frontier* (1935) she was beginning a more relaxed and open series of "Americana" dances.

Grouping all these under one rubric might lead you to expect a single style or point of view. Historically this would be untrue, although the differences could illustrate an important sequence. But Graham's obeisances to the past are perfunctory; these revivals serve the current need for repertory most of all, and are uniformly

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being done in current Graham style, a large, lush, insistent way of projecting everything. I imagine that if Denishawn had survived—it ceased operations in 1930, partly because Graham and her dissenting colleagues made it obsolete—it too might have fallen into a decadent superficiality. Graham's audience cheered hysterically.

Denishawn was very much in the entertainment business, despite Ruth St. Denis' periodic attempts to bring it back to the straight-and-narrow path of Art. I don't think St. Denis would have merely disapproved Maxine Sherman's rendition of *The Incense*; she would not have recognized it. No one is credited with directing this reconstruction, but it's hard to know how it could look so wrong when there are films of St. Denis performing the dance. Sherman seems to think of it as a pastiche of pre-World War I Orientalia, from Scheherazade to Ouija boards. She conjures and rolls her eyes and angles her arms picturesquely around herself. She bends backwards till her pelvic bone sticks out. She sways her hips like the back end of a trailer truck going around a mountain curve. This is not merely exaggerating movement, adapting it for a younger or more agile body, it's a distortion of the human shape, and a perversion of the spirituality that validated all St. Denis' ventures into exotica.

Lamentation (danced this season by Joyce Herring) and *Frontier* (Peggy Lyman) have long since been transformed from meditative to illustrative dances. Herring looks as if she's battling with some too-large piece of clothing as she shoves her upper body and arms against the tubular jersey that Graham used to confine the energy of grief. Lyman looks like a cheery, bustling housewife, just waiting for Jimmy Stewart to come in from the fields and give her a hand with the sheep shearing.

Serenata Morisca (Terese Capucilli) and *Tanagra* (Takako Asakawa) were new to me, and perhaps low expectations made them more pleasing. *Serenata*, a skirt dance, was reminiscent of St. Denis in one of her Nautch phases, and the *Tanagra*'s great virtue was its simplicity. Asakawa, draped in light veils, glides and twirls to one of the Satie Gnossiennes. Yet even this bit of ephemera, reconstructed from a 1931 film, looks rounder and more expansive than photos of Graham in the dance. (Neither critics, scholars, the public, nor the Graham inner circle are granted access to her documentary films.) Despite the flowing costume, Graham looked angular and withdrawn. Modern dance theorist Elizabeth Selden described the style of *Tanagra* in 1935 as "a clear but infinitely tenuous, frail form; spiritual filigree . . ."

We don't usually think of Martha Graham as frail or tenuous, but *Tanagra* and another, even more important, early revival, *Heretic* (1929), suggest an interesting subtext in Graham's career: the conquest of inner fear and the need to demonstrate power. As often as she has choreographed about stalwart females—Joan of Arc, Mary Queen of Scots and her rival Elizabeth I, for instance—she's depict-

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ed stricken ones. In fact, even those who eventually conquer have to battle their own doubts and anxieties. These moments when they falter are the saving of Graham's women—without the madness or misgivings, her heroines would be heartless killers and sirens. In *Heretic*, she succumbs to despair, for the only time I know of in all her sixty years of choreographing.

Heretic dates from the starkest, formative days of modern dance, and its architecture is breathtaking. Influenced by the expressionist artists Kathe Kollwitz and Ernst Barlach, Graham drew her argument in schematic, bold terms. A solitary figure confronts a group, eleven women all dressed and moving alike in two massive clusters. Standing sturdily in a row, the women rise up to their full height, then thump down and turn away. The heretic seems to plead with them—for admittance, for sympathy, we don't know—but they're unmoved. Each time they turn away, they form a new, rejecting shape—they stare over their shoulders, they raise their clenched fists and lean over the woman menacingly. After each confrontation, they pivot back to their line in silence with four implacable steps. Though the woman approaches them from all sides, circling, addressing, angling, she can't penetrate their solidarity. Though they never seem to travel at all, they assume every kind of obstructing shape—a wall, a rock, a dense forest. At the seventh repetition of the accompanying folk refrain, the woman manages to slice between the halves of the group, but still they bar her and she falls to her face on the floor. With the uncompromising directness of the period, all the action is abstracted; the group has the monumentality that can only be achieved by ritualized, unison action.

Animating these patterns, however, is a problem for the Graham dancers. Asakawa and Capucilli both did the leading role, and both gave it a dramatic, anguished pathos. The group was not only unyielding but unseeing. Two former Graham dancers I spoke to were dismayed by the production. They felt it should have had more feeling and less acting-out. An octogenerian who was in the original cast demonstrated how the group stood shoulder to shoulder, pressing against me so forcefully I almost lost my balance. She also observed that the group's changes of position were taken with different timings and impulses rather than being metrically all the same. What seems hard for young dancers to master is how to be inside of these early dances. They keep wanting to externalize and dramatize them, rather than experiencing the character that's physically built into the movement. Graham told a pre-season press conference: "I was what they called a rebel. I wasn't seeking to shatter anything, only to build something for myself. I wanted life to pass through me, as I saw it." This is not a concept her dancers today understand, nor her audiences, I suspect.

The declamatory style of contemporary Graham dancing has evolved over several years, and some of it may be an adaptation to

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performing on opera house stages. The shift this year from the New York State Theater to the much smaller City Center was a great improvement. Most of the repertory is chamber-sized, and looked bombastic the last few seasons in the State Theater. But the dancers no longer know how to be subtle. Their acting is all grimaces and open-mouthed ecstasy. They hurl themselves from one position to another at maximum intensity but without gradation in tone or attack.

Along with this aggressive performing style, Graham's choreography has narrowed down to one theme, one dance, an exposition of sexual arousal and sexual power games. Maybe it always was that, after she perfected her choreographic modes and devices in the 1940s. Now there seems to be very little structure—literary, musical, or theatrical—holding the action together. You can't blame a ninety-two-year-old genius for slacking off in inventiveness, but the "new" dances all look like bits of the old ones stuck together.

One new piece, "*Tangled Night*" (for some reason, some titles are in quotes, others are not), centers around a horny woman with snakes coiled strategically around her costume and springing out of her head. She seems determined to possess a hapless hero, who can't make up his mind whether he wants her or another lady who's dressed like a medieval maiden. Eventually the snake woman wins, but then she can't seem to think of what to do with the hero so she puts him to work as a galley slave, on the crew that propels her ship. The dance itself is a series of encounters between these three, depicting states of amorous desire or dread, but not the reasons for any of them. Especially, it doesn't explain why the hero pitches himself so desperately from the arms of one woman to the other and back again. "*Temptations of the Moon*" is simply a series of duets by a person called Crescent Moon and a person called Velvet Night and nine pairs of unnamed other dancers.

Two of the season's revivals, *Part Real—Part Dream* (1965) and *Plain of Prayer* (1968), are further variations on the theme of seduction, with different decors and costumes. The dancers charge across the space, grapple with each other, often simultaneously. They manipulate props in ways that would have made Freud blush—spears are a favorite phallic object, as are enveloping lengths of cloth. By now Halston has remade most of Graham's original costumes in opulent materials, with tucks and paddings to draw attention to the sexual zones of the body.

"*Every Soul is a Circus*" (1939) doesn't really fit into either this late mode of erotic indulgence or the harsh formalism of the early years. It might be seen as a witty discourse on the themes of dominance and submission that the subsequent Greek works raised to eloquent heights. But the present Graham audience lacks a strong image of Graham-as-tragedienne against which to counter the satirical Empress of the Arena in "*Circus.*" *Cave of the Heart*, the only

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piece from the Greek cycle done this season, looked really peculiar with a romanticized Jason (Donlin Foreman) and a Medea (Takako Asakawa) who behaved like some crazed Kabuki princess.

Except for these anomalous dance-plays, the overall trend of the repertory shows drama and character losing ground to movement embellished with simulated affect. I think no one has surpassed Martha Graham at making erotic shapes for dancers. The newer choreographies have employed these shapes almost academically. Like the steps of classical ballet, they signify human behavior and attitudes only in a general way, identifying a community and some of its concerns. Doing what they do, ballet dancers look proud, majestic, serene, as if they could achieve the highest we expect in ourselves. Graham dancers look devious, anguished, overwrought, sometimes intoxicated, and as if they're always in conflict about what they want. Perhaps we could think of Graham-shapes as a lexicon for some kind of "pure" modern dance choreography, but as Graham uses them now, they have no capacity to vary, modulate, resolve, hint, connect. That is, they can't get beyond static forms of address, or create interesting structure, which I think is the essence of any classical lexicon whether architectural, musical or balletic.

One thing I think Graham is working with now is high energy, a kind of physical near-violence. You see it not only in the souped-up dynamics and hard-driving delivery but in the extremes to which the plastique is subjected. Even twisted shapes strive for space, open ones are over-stretched. Extensions reach skyward—even the men are crotch-sprung. The feeling isn't really expansive, as in ballet, but something more intense, like competetiveness or thirst. I found the most physical dancing of the season was the men's chorus at the beginning of *The Rite of Spring*, where the speed and rapid rearrangements of body parts demanded muscularity on a mass scale.

It isn't accidental, either, that this dance—like a great deal of other theater dance today—offers an aesthetic and kinesthetic charge similar to what our culture gets from bodybuilding, aerobics and sports. What's startling is not that Martha Graham has picked up on what she calls "a restlessness, a surge" in contemporary life, but that she thinks our time resembles previous periods before wars broke out. "There's an extreme physical activity, a vibration," she says. "There's fear in the world, and the need to live life more completely and with enthusiasm."

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RICHARD HORNBY

Role Playing, Self Reference, and Openness

JONATHAN MILLER'S PRODUCTION OF EUGENE O'NEILL'S *Long Day's Journey into Night* promised very little from its inception, and lived down to expectations. Jack Lemmon, a notoriously uneven performer, was just as mannered in the role of James Tyrone as I had feared he would be; Bethel Leslie, an actress of insignificant reputation, played his wife Mary with all the nuance, variety, and intensity of a stopwatch. Miller's directorial "innovations" consisted of having the actors overlap their speeches in a mindless and irritating manner, all the while rattling off the lines at triple speed, with no thought of their meaning, context, or symbolic resonances. The whole thing was so juvenile and stupid that it would hardly even merit a review, were it not for the fact that so many critics took the nonsense seriously, citing the production as "novel," "provocative," "controversial," "highly professional," and so on; furthermore, Miller actually received both Tony and Drama Desk Award nominations for best director. The production was thus more interesting as a case study of many of the problems of American theatre and theatrical criticism than as a version of O'Neill's great play.

In some ways Miller, an Englishman, is like other foreign directors, such as Andrei Serban or Livieu Ciulei, who work in the United States. Coming from countries with strong, healthy theatrical traditions, where the classics are performed regularly by superb companies, they tend to direct productions that are not so much interpretations of classical plays as they are comments upon them, and upon their production histories. If audiences are used to a fine new production of, say, *Hamlet* every few years, then it makes some sense every now and then to provide a version that is offbeat or even distorted, to give the audience an interesting perspective on what has become a cultural artifact.

In our theatre, however, the classics are performed irregularly and erratically. In New York, they are enacted by pickup casts, with very short rehearsal periods—perhaps a third the time that would be allotted for rehearsal in a European repertory company—and are often treated as vehicles for stars, even with plays like *Long Day's Journey*, an ensemble piece if there ever was one. There is no strong, traditional classical repertory company in America, nothing to compare with the Comédie Française in France, the Moscow Art

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Theatre in Russia, the National Theatre in Britain, or even the Stratford Shakespeare Festival in Canada. This is the first Broadway production of *Long Day's Journey* since the original one thirty years ago; there have been only three off-Broadway productions, all with limited runs. For most of that time you would have had a better chance of seeing the play in Stockholm than here. To pretend that there is some moral imperative to find a new way of doing the play is fraudulent. Far from being sated by O'Neill, our audiences see far too little of him, and what they do see is rarely performed well.

The difference between Miller and directors like Serban and Ciulei, however, is that where their directorial approach tends to be highly stylized and symbolic, Miller here seemed to be attempting the most inane sort of naturalism, as if to combine the worst flaw of European avant-garde directing, heavy handedness, with the worst flaw of traditional American acting, insipidity. I can see no other explanation for such a tame, mechanical approach to O'Neill's play. How else do you justify the overlapping speeches, except by maintaining that people often speak that way in real life; how else justify the flat, uninflected, throw-away style of delivery except by noting that this, alas, is how Americans generally talk?

One trouble with this approach, among others, is that the Tyrones in *Long Day's Journey* are of course not ordinary Americans. They are supposed to be a theatrical family, and James Sr. is supposed to be a great actor in the heroic nineteenth-century style. In this production, James not only did not seem like a great actor, he did not seem like an actor at all. When he quoted Shakespeare, for example, there was no heightened tone or sense of music and rhythm; he might have been a grocer calling in an order. Lemmon filled the performance with all the naturalistic mannerisms that he has come to use on the screen, the twitches and grimaces and added noises, especially that quick little "ho-ho-ho" that has become his irritating trademark. His voice was tight and grating, his movements jerky and inexpressive. The great actors, on both stage and screen, have a wonderful relaxed economy about their performances. Look at famous actors like Bogart or Garbo or Brando on the screen and you will see what I mean; their faces are smooth, relaxed masks that seem always on the verge of expression. The result is an impression of enormous mystery, of untapped depths of emotion. Tense, busy, overexpressive actors like Lemmon seem paradoxically lifeless by contrast. In acting, stillness is strong, busyness is empty.

Long Day's Journey is far more than a naturalistic play. The theatrical metaphor pervades the entire work. There are incessant allusions to and quotations from famous plays and poems. James Jr. and Sr. are *both* actors, and Edmund, the other son, is a poet. All carry playacting into their everyday lives; we hear, for example, that when the rich Chatfields drove by the front yard while James

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was clipping the hedge, "they bowed to your father and he bowed back as if he were taking a curtain call." But even the nonactors in the play, both minor and major, are inveterate role players. Thus the Tryones' unseen tenant, a wily Irishman, "could hide behind a corkscrew." Mary, the drug addicted mother, dresses up in her wedding gown at the end, and plays herself as a young girl. All this is expressive of O'Neill's strongly Cartesian view of the self, a bipolar "ghost in the machine," with a barrier between the two that can only be broken down by drugs or alcohol or extreme emotional stress. Most of life consists of role playing, and social life, even on the level of the family, is a kind of theatre.

Any production of *Long Day's Journey*, no matter how personal or idiosyncratic, must carry its theatrical metaphor over onto the stage, or else it is not a production of O'Neill's play at all. Jonathan Miller and the New York critics who took him seriously have no sense of a play as an elaborated, interconnected metaphor; to them, it is just a piecemeal collection of characters who can be manipulated to achieve cheap effects and thus gain notoriety for the director. This is justified as an expression of directorial imagination, but is actually expressive of the lack of it.

A. R. Gurney's new play, *The Perfect Party*, which performed to full houses at Playwrights Horizons, is another of his comedies about "the Wasp culture of the Northeastern United States," as a character in one of his earlier plays says. It has become common to compare Gurney with Updike and Cheever, who have dealt with the same culture in fiction, but where their writing tends to be understated and psychologically suggestive, Gurney's plays are broadly satirical and verbally adroit, more in the tradition of Shaw and Wilde, as well as recent British writers like Alan Ayckbourn or Christopher Hampton. Everything is above board; the resonances are literary and sociological rather than psychological.

The Perfect Party concerns a college professor named Tony, whose obsession is to create just that, a "perfect" party, with an ideal mixture of guests, superb conversation, perfect dress, perfect timing, and so on. It is hard to imagine such an obsession occurring in real life, particularly with a college professor (I'm one, and I certainly don't share it), but then, odd obsessions are the stuff of comedy. No motivation is given for Tony's *idée fixe*; like Gwendolyn's desire to marry a man named Ernest in *The Importance of Being Earnest*, it is simply a given circumstance, even though here it is so all-consuming as to cause Tony to resign his job, and dream of becoming a famous professional party consultant—as if there were such a thing! All this points up the self-referential nature of Gurney's drama, his technique of constantly reminding the audience that they are not seeing real life, but rather a *play*, with literary antecedents and obvious dramatic techniques.

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Thus, Gurney brings in a character who is going to "review" Tony's party for a major New York newspaper, an obvious artificiality that is not justified but instead presented as a theatrical joke, since there are critics in the audience (including me) who are reviewing Gurney's play. There are repeated references to literary writers (Tony is, after all, a professor of literature and history), including Updike and Cheever (another joke on the critics) and Wilde. Tony compares the party to a play, referring to the guests before the party begins as being "off-stage"—where the actors playing the guests literally are. When the would-be party reviewer, an aggressive and self-centered woman whose obsession to become famous equals Tony's, complains that the party is set up too safely, lacking "danger," Gurney trots out the traditional device of having Tony play his own wicked twin brother, a turn of events that is not so much a dramatic development in the Aristotelian sense as it is a meta-dramatic satirizing of the device itself.

Naturally, all of Tony's attempts at perfection go wrong, as they always do in farce, and naturally there is a tacked-on happy ending, as artificial and self-referential as Macheath's escape from the gallows at the end of *Threepenny Opera*. Gurney's theme is the decline of social ritual in our lives. He points this up not only by what is depicted, but by calling attention to his own play as a theatrical ritual with obvious artificialities.

Gurney is thus very much a playwright of our time. The fact that his plays succeed is evidence of a significant change in the American theatre, which has been dominated for decades by psychological realism. He is lucky to have found a director (John Tillinger) and actors (particularly John Cunningham, who was so firm and straightforward as Tony) who understand his work. Many American actors and directors would have bogged down here in questions of character background and motivation, which are irrelevant. In *The Perfect Party*, the backgrounds and motivations are those of the play as a whole, and its Chinese box meanings were played delightfully and unaffectedly.

Goblin Market is a charming adaptation of Christina Rossetti's poem by Polly Pen (surely a "pen" name!) and Peggy Harmon. The production, at the downtown Circle in the Square, was more a recital than a play; the two sisters of the poem, Laura and Lizzie, played by Terri Klausner and Ann Morrison, spoke the words of the poem in a setting that was like a Victorian nursery, with a few fanciful backdrops and props. A dozen or so songs, drawn from or inspired by parts of the poem, were added. The acting and singing were superb, the music (some of it by Ms. Pen, and some drawn from other composers, including Brahms and Ives) delightful and evocative.

The most admirable thing about the production was its avoidance of literalness. (We saw no goblins, for example.) Like much of Ros-

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setti's poetry, "Goblin Market" is highly suggestive of many different meanings, but impossible to pin down definitely. Literary criticism today makes much of the "openness" of good literary works; the role of the reader or audience member is much more active than traditionally conceived. A good poem or play *suggests* rather than *means*; or, to put it another way, its meaning must be actively sought rather than just passively received. A good production of a poem or play should reflect this openness, rather than, as is so often the case, close the work down, by tediously showing us why Hamlet delays or what Ibsen's wild duck symbolizes.

The poem "Goblin Market," with its childlike diction and simplicity of tone, seems as if it should be simple to interpret, but in fact it is difficult to work out even a surface meaning. One of the sisters apparently overindulges in fruits (rendered as enormous, luscious props in the production) acquired at a goblin market (whatever that is), which yield both ecstasy and grave danger; somehow she avoids or surpasses the danger, and grows up. The poem suggests maturation, deflowering, sexual ecstasy, sexual excess, lesbianism, sibling rivalry, hatred, fear, horror, love, death, and many other things, but does not definitively mean any of them. The value of the production was that it didn't, either. It managed to be concrete and straightforward, yet delicate and mysterious.

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WENDY LESSER

Fanning the Flames

> "A man listening to a story is in the company of the storyteller; even a man reading one shares this companionship. The reader of a novel, however, is isolated, more so than any other reader. (For even the reader of a poem is ready to utter the words, for the benefit of the listener.) In this solitude of his, the reader of a novel seizes upon his material more jealously than anyone else. He is ready to make it completely his own, to devour it, as it were. Indeed, he destroys, he swallows up the material as the fire devours logs in the fireplace. The suspense which permeates the novel is very much like the draft which stimulates the flame in the fireplace and enlivens its play."
>
> —Walter Benjamin, "The Storyteller"

OVER THE LAST FEW YEARS, the distinction between story collections and novels has begun to blur. This is largely the result of a marketing strategy on the part of publishers: stories don't sell (so goes the conventional wisdom), so books of stories are packaged as novels. But publishers alone cannot make a literary trend, and I can't help feeling that writers, too, are seeking some middle ground, some compromise between the fully articulated novelistic plot and the traditional collection of discrete tales.

This kind of crossover was new and startling when Sherwood Anderson introduced it in *Winesburg, Ohio* in 1919, and for many decades he remained the sole English-language practitioner of the form. (European writers, when asked who has influenced them, often mention Anderson—a surprise to Americans, who have almost forgotten he existed.) But now everybody seems to be jumping on the Winesburg bandwagon. Four of the seven books I've chosen to review here might accurately be described as "linked stories," though two of them call themselves novels and a third waggishly labels itself "a text."

The irony, however, is that this move toward the short story has not brought us any closer to the notion of "storytelling" Benjamin put forth in his 1936 essay. The friendly author, the well-modulated voice that draws together the separate strands of incident and event, is equally absent (with a few exceptions) from story *and* novel, as currently practiced. If anything, the tendency has been reversed: the contemporary novel overflows with an abundance of authorial persona, while the story withdraws into a cold arena of dry

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no-comment. Thus those of us looking for comfortable companionship in our storytellers are destined for repeated disappointments. When we go calling on the short-story writers, we find that no one is home; and yet when we want a quiet moment alone with a book, the novelist is bound to come banging at our door.

A welcome exception to this trend is Josef Škvorecký's *The Swell Season.*[1] Škvorecký, a Czech exile living in Canada, is the author of *The Engineer of Human Souls*, my favorite novel of 1984. Like Milan Kundera, Škvorecký is obsessed with the country he has left behind; unlike Kundera, he possesses a charming disposition, a very light touch, and a palatable attitude about relations between the sexes. Whereas Kundera's men are always stomping on the emotions of their women, Škvorecký's are just as liable to be the self-defeating victims. His Danny Smirický, the teenage protagonist and narrator of *The Swell Season*, is an unlikely cross between Alexander Portnoy and an early Woody Allen character. Desperate to take a girl to bed (he has approached twenty-three of them in his small Czech town), Danny nonetheless always loses out at the last minute: to another boy, to an irate father, or simply to the girl's own coquettish whim. In one of the six stories (or chapters) into which the book is divided, he is even ready to make a Faustian pact with the devil, embodied in a beautiful redhead—until he discovers that "she" is actually two identical twins, deliberately playing a trick on him because of his skirt-chasing reputation.

As in other Škvorecký works, love is not the whole story: jazz and politics are inevitably part of the plot. Danny's "swell season," his coming of age, takes place in a Czechoslovakia occupied by the Nazis, and as the stories progress this alien shadow grows longer. The occupation is of language as well as ideology, and one of the most darkly humorous passages occurs when the local SA officer insists on tinkering with Danny's German translation of a Czech musical libretto. In the process, a song that begins as

> In the office a triple jazz band plays for dancing
> A paper river full of blue flags
> Carp, trout, and arborous blooms
> Gaily dance the Charleston

gradually becomes

> In the woods a brass band plays for dancing.
> The blue river mirrors the brown flags
> Lads and maidens under the blooming trees
> Gaily dance the folkloric *Ländler*,

[1] THE SWELL SEASON, by *Josef Škvorecký*. The Ecco Press. $8.50p.

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and we grow to realize that having fun and creating metaphor are both subversive activities.

This "Text on the Most Important Things in Life," as Škvorecký subtitles the book, is permeated with the sense of a lost paradise. It is a paradise in which one's desires (to get the girl, to play the perfect jazz performance, to vanquish the Nazis through pure wit) are never quite achieved, but in which desire itself lends the necessary spice to existence. And to the normal poignance of everybody's lost adolescence is added a special poignance of historical perspective. Škvorecký's longing for that beautiful little town of Kostelec, where the girls were prettier and the music more exciting than anywhere else in the world, is not just the nostalgia of a man for his youth, but also the deeply moving wistfulness of an unwilling exile.

The richly continuous authorial voice that characterizes *The Swell Season* is utterly absent from *Stunning the Punters*,[2] a British collection of fictive monologues, each complete with its own linguistic tics and grammatical variations. In his cover photograph, author Robert Sproat looks a great deal like the characters in the film *The Draughtman's Contract*, and indeed his literary technique seems to share something of their eighteenth-century love of artifice. Possibly Sproat is actually trying to transform himself into each of his characters (a teenage girl who loves motorcycle men, an Indian shopkeeper concerned about his son, a retarded woman led astray by a nosy young do-gooder, a retired sailor, an aging daughter of a semi-famous poet, and so on), but my impression is that he is merely *doing* them, as in an extended music-hall routine.

The point of these stories is their difference, and yet what comes across is how similar they seem: one London character after another going on at you *ad nauseam*, as if he or she had you trapped in the corner of the local pub and felt free to talk your ear off. The monologue is an extremely difficult form because by its very nature it's so artificial; people don't really talk uninterruptedly for twenty minutes unless they're crazy. Skilled practitioners of the form, like Edgar Allan Poe and Paul Bowles, solve this problem by making their monologuists into madmen. But young recruits to short-story writing tend just to ignore the problem, blindly choosing the monologue as a suitable vehicle for exhibiting their literary flexibility. *Stunning the Punters* is basically a British version of Jayne Anne Phillips' *Black Tickets* or Mary Robison's *An Amateur's Guide to the Night*—it shows talent and some skill, but not much heart or sense.

Collaborators,[3] on the other hand, is a fully realized novel that began as a monologue in Janet Kauffman's earlier book of short stories, *Places in the World A Woman Could Walk*. The novel as a whole retains something of the monologue format—the narrator speaks to us urgently, obsessively, in the present tense—but in addition we

[2] STUNNING THE PUNTERS, by *Robert Sproat*. Faber & Faber. $11.95p.
[3] COLLABORATORS, by *Janet Kauffman*. Alfred A. Knopf. $13.95.

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get dialogue from other characters and even snippets of their writing, in the form of letters. The story from which Kauffman grew this book ("grew" being the appropriate word, for she is a farmer as well as a poet and fiction-writer, and has a healthy respect for organic form) was called "My Mother Has Me Surrounded," and that is an apt description of the novel's theme. The narrator, Andrea Doria, is in danger of being shipwrecked amidst the profusion of her mother's oceanic personality. This mother is a woman of liquids—a swimmer of seas, a sorceress of menstrual blood, a reveller in tobacco tar—and she is more than half crazy. The dangerous, exciting relationship between mother and daughter gets resolved—and destroyed—when the mother has a stroke and essentially forgets her entire previous self.

Kauffman's tale of childhood, adolescence, and self-definition is set in a Mennonite tobacco-farming community. Whereas that setting would be *the* story in a simpler medium (the movie *Witness*, for instance), it is merely the background here: it provides a peripheral weirdness that is related, though not directly as a cause, to the much vaster weirdness of the mother's character. As in Kauffman's stories, the details of farming lend a counterweight of realism and specificity to the world of the imagination the novel largely inhabits. *Collaborators* is not an easy book, nor is it a lovable one, but it is powerful and brilliant and marvelously written. Watching her mother walk across the fields at night, the narrator says:

> The darkness of the coat washes completely into the darkness of the air, and she appears to be a construction for the transportation of night—a homemade device that carts a wedge across the field. Her legs, in the wrong stockings, glow very white. Her feet, sunk in black shoes, disappear into the ground. When she walks away from me, her legs carry her. Her hair points in all directions.

Rarely in modern American writing has so much attention been paid to rhythm, to subtle linguistic peculiarities, and to the strength of simple words.

Monkeys,[4] also a first novel, is somewhat less carefully written, and it has not yet fully emerged from its genesis as a short-story collection. For instance, in the nine chapters about the Vincent family—New England Catholics with seven children, the "monkeys" of the title—we are repeatedly given signposts about who the siblings are: "Sherman, the middle brother," "Chicky and Minnie, the two youngest Vincents," and so on. If this were really a novel, as the jacket proclaims, we would not have to be told such facts anew in every chapter. There is also an inexplicable change in viewpoint, from

[4] MONKEYS, by *Susan Minot*. Dutton/Lawrence. $15.95.

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first-person narration in the first chapter to third-person in the rest. But what really troubles me is that the individual episodes of *Monkeys* succeed better as stories than the novel does as a whole. "Hiding," for instance, is one of the best short stories I've read in the last year, and it deserves the opening position it's been given in this collection. But if the collection is viewed as a continuous novel, and that story reduced merely to the first chapter, the balance is destroyed. The later stories in *Monkeys* are unfortunately the weaker ones, and they place the emphasis of the book on its sentimental conclusion rather than on its skillfully described evocations of moment and character.

The plot of *Monkeys* bears an uncanny and unacknowledged resemblance to that of *To the Lighthouse*. A large, interesting family, which moves annually between a regular residence and a summer house by the sea, is held together mainly by the warmth and humanity of the attractive mother. When she dies suddenly, the family essentially falls apart, since the children have no way of communicating with their reclusive, difficult father. Like *To the Lighthouse*, *Monkeys* even ends with a boatride (to scatter the mother's ashes). From the media coverage of this novel I gather that it's largely autobiographical—that is, Susan Minot was borrowing from her own life rather than from Virginia Woolf's book. Yet the correspondences take one aback. Don't young writers read anymore? Don't they worry at all about being pale shadows of a grand past? I'm not one to wish an anxiety-of-influence complex on anyone, but *some* recognition of a literary tradition would be in order here.

The death of a strong, kind mother and the relationships among the surviving siblings are also the themes of *Cousin Rosamund*,[5] the third novel in the series that began with Rebecca West's *The Fountain Overflows*. Each succeeding novel has been worse than the last—so much so that while *Fountain* is one of the best family novels written in this century, and *This Real Night* has many compelling moments, *Cousin Rosamund* is a dead loss. "Dead" is the operative word here: only *Fountain* appeared during Rebecca West's lifetime, and she was undoubtedly correct in feeling that the other two were not ready for publication. *This Real Night*, at least, benefits from the fact that Rebecca West was still alive when she wrote it, whereas *Cousin Rosamund* has been cobbled together from manuscripts and typescripts and outlines after her death.

This third book in the proposed tetralogy (which was to carry the Aubrey family through the first half of the twentieth century) picks up when Rose and Mary, the narrator and her twin, have become recognized concert pianists. The girls and the century are both in their twenties, and postwar life seems luxurious but empty. Neither Rose nor Mary sees much point in living now that their beloved

[5] COUSIN ROSAMUND, by *Rebecca West*. Viking. $16.95.

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brother and their capable mother have died, and they spend a lot of time bemoaning the fact that they can speak to no one but each other and their dear Cousin Rosamund. But Rosamund, halfway through the book, inexplicably marries a fat "Levantine" businessman, apparently for his wealth. This is an utter violation of her character, or what Rose takes to be her character, and from then she is lost to the twins. (In a postscript to the novel, Victoria Glendinning says West intended, in the fourth volume, to show that the visionary Rosamund had put herself in this position precisely so she could carry out a single act of great mercy in Hitler's concentration camps, just before dying a martyr's death. This is the kind of hokey spiritualism that faintly taints the first novel and virtually destroys this third volume.)

But the real loss in *Cousin Rosamund* is one of tone. *The Fountain Overflows* has an inexpressibly delicate voice: that of a wisely innocent, tragically humorous child. In *Rosamund*, this voice has been bizarrely perpetuated in a grown woman, and all the things that gave young Rose's situation its piquancy (the family's poverty, her parents' eccentricity, her untested ambitions about her own musical career) have been replaced by their opposites (Rose and Mary are rich and successful, the dead parents are saints, etc.). Moreover, the appealing clannishness of the first volume has turned into an overweening, claustrophobic fear of all differences—with the result that the book is outrageously homophobic, unconsciously ethnocentric, and generally ungenerous to a high degree. The fact that some of this claustrophobia is authorially intended (in the end, Rose falls in love and breaks out of her family prison) in no way mitigates the damage done to the novel; it is a distasteful book.

Robert Stone has also written a distasteful book,[6] but he hasn't even got Rebecca West's excuse, since he presumably conspired in its publication. *Children of Light* is one of those dreary, depressing Hollywood novels that suffer from the imitative fallacy: reading it is like spending several days in the unremitting company of boozed-up, drugged-out, suicidal film types. Perhaps my sympathy for such people is less than it ought to be, but my interest in the novel never rose above the purely clinical. Not one gram of emotion stirred in me when our heroine—the ghoul-ridden, schizophrenic, lovely Lu Anne—walked into the Mexican sea and died. Nor did I pity or even like Gordon Walker, the screenwriter-hero, whose pretentious asides about *King Lear* only made his own little melodramatic life seem all the more petty.

The devouring suspense that Walter Benjamin mentions is present in this novel, but it all comes to nought: you whiz through the pages hoping to reach some moment of catharsis, and end up with nothing but a few gritty ashes in your hands. One can tell, reading

[6] CHILDREN OF LIGHT, by *Robert Stone*. Alfred A. Knopf. $17.95.

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this work, that Robert Stone is an intelligent man capable of good writing, but that ability hides behind the arras, and, like Polonius, gets fatally stabbed before it can ever take action. So we are left instead with obvious, careless writing like that in the following paragraph:

> When he had helped himself to a five-milligram tablet of Valium and some B complex, he stepped on the bathroom scale, closed the cabinet and was confronted once more with his own image. Men Walker's age were held to be responsible for their faces, a disquieting notion. But his was hardly a mask of depravity. He drew himself erect and stared it down. Just a face, quite an ordinary one. Caught, he squinted to examine the creature in the glass. It was his business to know how he looked; he worked as an actor from time to time. He looked, he decided, like a man in his forties who drank. For most of his life he had appeared younger than his age. Perhaps it was just the light, he thought. He looked away and stepped on the bathroom scale.

Aside from anything else, Walker steps on the scale *twice* without stepping off in between. This is the writing of an author who has ceased to care much about his central character—and we are only on page five here. Under such circumstances, how can *we* be expected to sustain interest in him for the rest of the volume?

In stark contrast to Stone's carelessness is the meticulous care John le Carré has taken in his latest novel.[7] Meticulousness is nothing new for le Carré: all his novels are as tightly woven and as complex as medieval tapestries. What is new here is the depth of characterization. *A Perfect Spy* is le Carré's best novel since *The Spy Who Came In From the Cold*, and possibly his best ever.

Magnus Pym, the central figure and sometime narrator of the novel, is a middle-aged British spy currently posted in Vienna. As the novel opens, we learn that his father, Richard T. Pym, has just died, and that Magnus has taken this opportunity to escape from everybody—his British boss (wryly named Brotherhood), his wife Mary, his Czech contact—and hide in a seaside boardinghouse where he's known simply as Mr. Canterbury. There he proceeds to write out the story of his life, addressed primarily to his son Tom. It is a story mainly about his father's career as a con man and a betrayer, and his own subsequent moves in that direction. Intercut with chapters of Pym's autobiography (which itself wavers sentence by sentence between a distant third-person and an involved first-person) are chapters describing Brotherhood's and Mary's search for the missing Pym. So, for instance, we read about Pym's school friends or family familiars in Magnus' chapters, and then meet their

[7] A PERFECT SPY, by *John le Carré*. Alfred A. Knopf. $18.95.

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aged versions in person as Brotherhood interviews them in the course of tracking Pym.

All this sounds very complicated, but it's actually more accessible than the usual le Carré fare. The "tradecraft," while fascinatingly presented, is kept to a minimum, and the spy jargon is also less intrusive than in, say, the Smiley books. Instead of that single overwhelming vocabulary of professional spying, le Carré here offers us a range of conversational styles—the weaselly self-assurance of Rick Pym and the fanatical devotion of his "court"; the stiff-upper-lipism of a British private school; the relative openness of a Swiss family boardinghouse or an Anglo-Catholic military family posted abroad; the decadent dishonesties of Oxford; the hilarious foolishness of a high-level American intelligence agent; and so on. In each case, le Carré's ear is finely tuned to the speech patterns of the characters in question: like the man in *Bleak House*, "he do the Police in different voices."

Dickens, in fact, is the prevailing influence behind this novel. Rick Pym, with his repetitious failures, his incessant problems with "liquidity," and his obvious subterfuges, is like a darker, more malevolent Mr. Micawber—what Mr. Micawber would be if he were really your father (as he was Dickens'), and not just a chance acquaintance, as he was for David Copperfield. Rick even *sounds* Micawberish in his high-flown, over-capitalized letters to Magnus:

> Medical Science being still at a primitive Stage here, it appears notwithstanding that this Cruel summer is likely to be the writer's Last, despite Sacrifice of Alcohol and other Comforts. If you are Sending for Treatment or Funeral be sure to make out cheque and envelope to Colonel, not Self, as the name of Pym is Persona non Gratis to the natives, and anyway may be Dead.

There is also a description of a suburban housing estate ("Number 81 had faced himself in teak. And number 79, on which Brotherhood now advanced, was resplendent with a Union Jack fluttering from a fine white flagpole planted just inside his territory") which borrows unashamedly from Mr. Wemmick's Castle in *Great Expectations*.

But what is most Dickensian about *A Perfect Spy* is the love its author bears his characters. Every one of them stands up on his own (and on *her* own—Mary is unusually sympathetic for a le Carré wife), and even the bad guys are fascinating. Axel, Pym's oldest friend and Czech controller, is compellingly wise and amusing and affectionate despite the fact that he represents corruption; we unresistingly believe in the depth of his friendship for Pym. Rick is despicable but also marvelous—a hateful, silly man who nonetheless inspires great passion in women, children, the poor, and the weak. And each minor character is lovingly granted his own form of ec-

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centricity, wit, and perceptiveness. This is a novel which respects both its readers and its characters enormously: it meets intelligence with intelligence, pouring its author's best into priceless vessels out of which the beloved guest is warmly invited to drink.

All le Carré novels possess the burning suspense, "the draft which stimulates the flame," of which Benjamin wrote. But in most of his other novels we burn through so singlemindedly that we do indeed destroy and swallow up the material, leaving ourselves with nothing as we reach the final pages. We are in such a hurry to get to the conclusion, to resolve the mystery, that the ending is invariably a disappointment. This is not true of *A Perfect Spy*. Here the end is contained in the beginning: there are no sudden twists to the plot, and the process of exposure is so inevitable, so certain, that we can feel the ending coming a long way off. Yet that in itself is somehow satisfying, and no less compelling than the trickier technique. "What draws the reader to the novel," Benjamin has said, "is the hope of warming his shivering life with a death he reads about." *A Perfect Spy* is a bonfire of a novel.

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THOMAS DePIETRO

Minimalists, Moralists and Manhattanites

RECENT TALK OF A SHORT STORY REVIVAL often ignores the obvious: more, not better, collections than ever before are being published. In fact, this marketplace vitality disguises a genre in malaise. Not the short story per se, but that popular species, practiced by Raymond Carver, Ann Beattie and Co., and accurately described by its hostile critics as "shrinking," "diminishing," and "dwindling."

Tobias Wolff, a recent PEN/Faulkner Award winner, writes the kind of short fiction that we might call, to paraphrase Carver, the what-we-talk-about-when-we-have-nothing-to-say story. His new collection, *Back in the World,* exemplifies the trendy "minimalist" mode with its conspicuous absence of subject matter.[1] These stories, for all their surface detail, might well be set anywhere, and that's the point: the middle-American metaphysicians who people Wolff's tales are often loners, far from home, friendless and in search of something, though neither they nor we know what they hope to find. Time and again, his characters reach a kind of pseudo-epiphany, as in "Sister," a vignette in which a young woman named "Marty," an Edgar Cayce enthusiast, goes out for an afternoon jog. Still slightly paranoid from the joint she smoked earlier, this believer in reincarnation has a spaced-out conversation with two guys in the park, and then almost gets run over chasing after a Frisbee. Back at her apartment steps, the lonely woman realizes there's no one to tell about this brush with death, nor anyone to assure her "that everything was going to be all right." This leads to the equally enigmatic insight "that there was never going to be anyone to tell her these things. She had no idea why this should be so; it was just something she knew."

Even the longer, hence somewhat more compelling, pieces ("Soldier's Joy," "Our Story Begins," or "The Rich Brother") end washed-out and proud of it. This is especially annoying in "The Missing Person," the best of the lot, which begins with great promise. Fr. Leo, a young but old-fashioned priest, finds himself the pastor of a wild, post-Vatican II convent in financial and physical shambles. The dull clergyman and a smooth-talking fundraiser, the latter a likeable charlatan, celebrate their success at soliciting contri-

[1] BACK IN THE WORLD, by *Tobias Wolff*. Houghton Mifflin. $15.95.

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butions with a junket to Las Vegas ("when you reach a certain point it's the logical place to come"). Amidst the high rollers and lounge lizards, Jerry disappears with the money he's been secretly embezzling from the convent. Bored Fr. Leo, out of his collar, befriends a lonely woman who, as if aware this story is going nowhere, provides what could serve as the epigraph to Wolff's entire collection: "Once I start something I have to finish it. I have to take it to the end and see how it turns out, even if it turns out awful."

The title of Deborah Eisenberg's stylish debut, *Transactions in a Foreign Currency*, well prepares us for these seven stories about young women who cannot translate feeling into language, a dilemma that leaves the reader in as much doubt and confusion as it does the other characters.[2] Like Wolff, and a lot of other short story writers these days, Eisenberg has her ditzy narrators casually indicate their creator's narrative strategies. "Flotsam," for example, is a quirky account of a self-effacing woman who suffers through the after-shock of a failed "relationship." Overwhelmed by her new life in Manhattan, self-conscious Charlotte teases us with the following suggestion: "Perhaps what eventually appears to be information always appears at first to be just flotsam, meaningless fragments, until enough flotsam accretes to manifest, when one notices it, a construction." The cleverly phrased tale succeeds as a "construction," with Charlotte eventually discovering her real self despite the pervasive anomie afflicting her fellow New Yorkers. In most of the remaining, affectless stories—but especially in "Rafe's Coat" and "Days"—the "meaningless fragments" merely pile up into a heap of current writerly clichés: empty images and brand-name things, the residue of "cultivating a silent area" of life.

Like Wolff, Eisenberg trades in sham revelation; the fifteen-year-old narrator in "What It Was Like, Seeing Chris," unwittingly torments an older man with whom she shares some awkwardly affectionate moments, and ends her story thus:

> And I thought how maybe once there was, say, a princess who lost her mother's ring in a forest, and how in some other galaxy a strange creature might fall, screaming, on the shore of a red lake, and how right that second there could be a man standing at a window overlooking a busy street, aiming a loaded revolver, but how it was just me, there, after Chris, staring at that turtle in the fourth-grade room and wondering if it would die before I stopped being able to see it.

But Eisenberg's verbal flash and scatterbrain surrealism, while a relief from Wolff's toneless prose, fail to mask her real subject—contemporary "relationships."

[2] TRANSACTIONS IN A FOREIGN CURRENCY, by *Deborah Eisenberg*. Alfred A. Knopf. $15.95.

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"Relationship" is a word that appears so frequently in recent story collections that it can define a sub-genre—a type of short fiction that reaches its nadir in Perri Klass's *I Am Having an Adventure*.[3] Fashionably spare in their lack of style, these twenty interchangeable tales of *haute* yuppiedom combine gourmet sex and food. They're mostly present-tense adventures in "lifestyles," in which Klass quickly chews up the little she's bitten off. Her utterly predictable gay and straight couples stand in bold contrast to those in Tama Janowitz's *Slaves of New York*, a collection as wild in its unevenness as it is deliberate in its weirdness.[4] Janowitz thrives on the quotidian oddities found in the East Village and thereabouts. Her rock-and-roll sensibility is new-wave and, although her characters prefer groups like Teenage Jesus and The Circle Jerks, she herself comes off like a literary Cyndi Lauper, a connoisseur of kitsch capable of being assimilated into the mainstream.

Janowitz's masterful story, "The Slaves in New York," introduces the haplessly hip couple who drift in and out of focus throughout the volume ("Who's on First?," "Physics," and "Patterns" are just a few of the stories in which they reappear). The "apartment situation" being what it is in Manhattan, Eleanor, a jewelry maker who's always slightly out of step with what's in—she's still making plastic James Bond-doll earrings—can't afford to leave the functional digs she shares with Stash, her graffiti artist boyfriend, best known for his painting, "The Wisdom of Solomon," in which the cartoon characters Quick Draw MacGraw and Babalooey saw an Eskimo baby in half. When Eleanor, enslaved by both fashion and real estate, meets a South African who writes, in her words, "political-type novels," Stash's slave-driver instinct asserts itself. Eleanor's innocent chats over coffee with Mikell, though infuriating to Stash, nevertheless suggest that something meaningful is going on in this story—an ironic commentary on Western forms of (self-) oppression perhaps. But none of the other post-modern parables collected by Janowitz, especially those told by her whacked-out narrator Eleanor, supply the kind of gloss needed here to sort out her intentions. In short, we're never certain whether these often disposable tales are a symptom or a parody of the junk culture Janowitz chronicles so well. Wicked send-ups of Yale feminist deconstructors ("Engagements") and of Springsteen's proletarian posturing ("You and the Boss") assure her status among those who blur the distinctions between high and low culture. The rest of us are desperately seeking guidance through her uncharted ironies.

At first glance, the tonier addresses of Laurie Colwin's mismatched lovers in *Another Marvelous Thing* and the run-down apartments in *Slaves of New York* seem worlds apart.[5] But they're separat-

[3] I AM HAVING AN ADVENTURE, by *Perri Klass*. G. P. Putnam's Sons. $17.95.
[4] SLAVES OF NEW YORK, by *Tama Janowitz*. Crown Publishers. $15.95.
[5] ANOTHER MARVELOUS THING, by *Laurie Colwin*. Alfred A. Knopf. $13.95.

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ed by just the price of a subway token, or as Janowitz's Eleanor puts it during one of her moments north: "the same mess, only in a different neighborhood." The mess, in Colwin's case, results from an extramarital "love affair," of which these eight stories form a rough history. Colwin's collection, like Janowitz's, never improves upon its single near-perfect piece; here it's "My Mistress." In this expertly crafted and updated prose version of Shakespeare's sonnet (#130), Colwin allows a formal and fastidious banker to sing the praises of his "glum" and "grumpy" lover, herself an economic historian. Despite her preference for threadbare corduroy and stale water biscuits, Billy (nee Josephine) elicits from her older, nattily attired Francis this charming admission: "I want her not ever to stop being." All of the episodes in Billy and Francis' tumultuous "relationship"—like Colwin, I can't seem to avoid the word—attest to the "terrible privacy and loneliness" that "adulterous love brings." And that's the problem with this always soigné volume—it's an exercise in elegant variation. Holding this illicit romance up to the light, Colwin keeps turning it around and around so that unimportant facts reappear in a way that calls out for an editorial pencil. Her repetitive stories, with all their self-styled "poignant moments," never live up to the underlying conceit:

> A love affair was another amazing product of human ingeniousness, like art, like scholarship, like architecture. It was a created thing with rules, language, and reference. When it was finished it lived on its artifacts: a million memories and gestures.

Instead we realize how much this "marvelous thing" called love resembles the loopy attachments in Janowitz; in Manhattan, what ultimately rends couples apart seems to be a simple matter of style: a dissimilar taste in food, or furniture.

Primarily a paean to fabulous affection, the postscript to Colwin's story finds Billy back with her husband and a new baby, no longer a mistress but a mother, and happy some of the time in her new role. Domestic relationships interest Linda Collins as well, even though most of the stories in *Going to See the Leaves* are set in the same Manhattan that seems childless in Eisenberg, Klass, Janowitz and most of Colwin.[6] (In *their* Manhattan, the adults just *act* like kids.) As a matter of fact, Collins' thoughts on the nature of motherhood are all that link some of these stylistically disparate tales. In "Meditation on Play, Thoughts on Death," for example, a mother reflects on the inventive play of her son, and her language begins to transform his games into heroic literature. As the years pass by, her faith in his immortality—his epical innocence—wanes, and she must confront inevitable aging and death. Despite a few other workmanlike pieces,

[6] GOING TO SEE THE LEAVES, by *Linda Collins*. Viking. $15.95.

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Collins' mostly forgettable narratives seem to have snuck over the transom and into hard covers. The longest, "The Doctor's House," stands out by virtue of its inept writing ("The fact that she had so taken charge in the sexual passage that had transpired between them seemed reason enough to think she would not need to be escorted in a taxi all the way out through the snowy night to the departures terminal") and its uncharacteristic touch of fantasy. The easy irony here results from a successful and self-assured male lawyer discovering himself to be pregnant, which of course shakes his smug complacency.

Except for occasional aberrations like Collins' incredible account of male pregnancy, the accumulated literary evidence suggests that there aren't eight million stories in the Naked City, but fewer than eight. Nor are domestic and romantic relations strictly the purview of the female imagination. Indeed, Frank Conroy's particularly egregious *Midair* proves to be a maudlin, self-pitying, and embarrassing male version of these everyday affairs.[7] Most of the incidents and memories collected here—some recalling infidelity, others youthful vanities—bear a strong resemblance to the facts of Conroy's life, and it's a life about which we may already know too much after reading his one previous book, the autobiographical *Stop-time*. From the information sprinkled throughout these narratives—few could be called stories—we learn that, in the years between publication, Conroy's literary "persona" has grown older, not up. The self-absorbed behavior once excused by callow youth is later explained by a "mid-life crisis"—he actually uses this psychobabble without irony in "The Sense of the Meeting." The sad and sensitive men (or man, if you see it that way) in Conroy's other reminiscences cry a lot about their divorces, their broken families, and their writers' blocks. The last doesn't prevent one of them from self-consciously letting *us* know that *he* knows the tricks of the trade:

> He'd often read descriptions of people in novels "turning white" or "ashen," and as a writer, he would never have allowed himself to use those words. Not, that is, until he saw Mary actually do it.

"Gossip," from which this twaddle comes, is a cautionary tale about life among the glitterati—even that old literary faker herself, Lillian Hellman, makes a cameo appearance under another name. The main character, a writer successful early in life, recalls his younger self when he was "entranced by the surface of life." But here's what we are supposed to consider an example of those alluring exteriors—an instance of allegedly captivating badinage:

[7] MIDAIR, by *Frank Conroy*. E.P. Dutton. $15.95.

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"To beauty!" Ivan, slightly drunk, raised his glass.
"Yes!"
"Abso-fucking-lument!" George said.
"No, no. It's absolu-fucking-ment," Jean-Claude said.
"Who was it," Harriet rasped through cigarette smoke, "who refused to drink a toast to art? I can't remember."

With wit like this sallying about, no wonder George later retreats into a different "lifestyle." By the end of this trashy bit of self-flattery, George has a new wife half his age, and an emotionally rewarding job as a creative writing teacher—all of which teaches him that, despite the necessary pain, people still love each other. Ah, the wisdom of the middle-aged survivor!

Although negligible volumes like Conroy's and Collins' seem to flood the marketplace, a few collections rise above the deluge. Where other writers are content to echo "the charming rhythms of family life," Mary Flanagan recreates the "nightmare intimacy of family life" in her debut collection, *Bad Girls*.[8] And she does so with the kind of wit and panache that never draws attention to itself. Her young and old, and oh so naughty, girls continually test the boundaries of decent behavior, and often exceed them. Some steal other women's husbands ("Melusina"), some lose themselves in booze and drugs ("A Parma Violet Room," "Simple Pleasures"), and some just go momentarily dotty ("Wild Garlic"), but they all do something that seldom happens in recent story collections: they make choices that have real consequences. In "A View of Manhattan," Amaryllis, a transatlantic adulterer, witnesses from her airplane window New York City in flames—the apocalyptic result of her personal immorality. The plump and stately matron of "Death in Sussex" desires a decorous death, not the messy one promised by the cancer inside her. Here she is on the floor of her greenhouse, her suicide-by-pills turning into a botched job:

"My temple," she whispered as she rested beside a trollius europaeus. "My Temple of Flora. Let me shelter myself in you for ever." She gazed at the flower, imagining what it would be like to be hidden eternally in the depths of its butter-yellow safety. . . . Suddenly the trollius seemed different, and disturbingly so. Harriet pulled herself closer to a day lily and bent it gently towards her. It too had changed. She looked around. All of them had subtly and horribly changed. They seemed to jut, to spread, to dangle and stretch themselves in the most lurid manner. She drew back.

[8] BAD GIRLS, by *Mary Flanagan*. Atheneum Publishers. $12.95.

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Trying to find consolation in the details of her beloved flora, she finds instead the "nasty" business of sex.

Flanagan, an American living in London, looks for inspiration not to Beattie or Carver, the supposed masters of short fiction, but, God forbid, to that early literary emigré, Henry James. Exile, even if only temporary, might just be the only solution to the literary impasse reached by so many of today's stunted talents. When Norman Rush left the States to work with the Peace Corps in Botswana, he must have felt the conviction and seriousness of purpose everywhere evident in *Whites*.[9] Experience clearly meant some harsh lessons, and the most important one in these most moral of fictions is that white people can't hope to solve, nor even fully understand, the problems of post-colonial corruption and revolutionary madness. But the anthropologists and the engineers, the do-gooders and the cynics in these mostly interlocking stories seldom have political purposes, and why should they? Take the wife and husband of "Instruments of Seduction" and "Alone in Africa." The former, bored and in Africa not by choice but for her husband's work, seeks thrills through occult dabblings and sexual conquests—312 men have fallen, to be exact. And her buffoonish husband, we discover in the latter story, fears the consequences of his single flirtation with adultery. But his potential affair with a most mysterious and willing African girl promises to be sleazy and exploitative.

What lures these whites to Africa? The "official Americans" in the brilliant tale of that title include the weak-willed Carl, inured to the bureaucratic disasters he was sent there to help prevent. During some uncharacteristic days of living dangerously, he comes to a moment of truth.

> Drought, poor people . . . Even when they get a decent movie, they mix up the reels. We want to be here anyway, but we can't figure out why. Except that one night I figured it out. It's because it isn't our country and we can't help what happens. We can offer people advice and we get paid for it. We get good vacations, we eat off the top of the food chain, we get free housing. Hey!, but we're not responsible for what happens if Africa goes to hell, *because we've done our best.*

It's typical of Rush's fine sense of irony—which is superior to, say, Janowitz's because his is centered in a recognizable world of good and evil—that Carl soon forgets why he's even going on like this. Rush's cynical view of the Third World never descends to uncontrolled ridicule either, though the fractured monologue of an African drifter-thief ("Thieving") provides plenty of opportunities.

Moral choices and ideas in conflict: these are also the stuff of Ste-

[9] WHITES, by *Norman Rush*. Alfred A. Knopf. $14.95.

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phen Millhauser's strange literary inventions in *In The Penny Arcade*, fictions that in no other way resemble Rush's.[10] With Millhauser's unapologetically intellectual prose we are also blessedly far from the attenuated voices of the more celebrated short story writers. In the title story—and, yes, here's a *story* in the sense we mean when discussing Poe or Hawthorne—the young narrator has returned to a scene of former mystery, the now broken-down arcade. The dying machines there, the cowboy slow to the draw and the fortuneteller with a missing eye, reveal their darker sides as they momentarily come alive in front of one who doesn't mock them in their decay. The previously demure woman in the movieola falls from innocence, and begins a visual seduction equal to Millhauser's prose:

> Prodigal and exuberant in her undressing, she offered a rich revelation of half-glimpses, an abundance of veiled and dusky disclosures. She blossomed with shimmer, silk, and shadow, ushering me into a lush and intricate realm of always more dangerous exposures which themselves proved to be new and dazzling concealments.

For all of Millhauser's fascination with magic and fable in such similarly wonderful tales as "Snowmen" and "Cathay," his art is an example of fantasy against itself, illusion in defense of an implied reality.

The dreamlike novella, "August Eschenburg," invites us into the mind of its eponymous hero—a legendary maker of flawless automatons. Through him, we discover the workings of the creative process, but are also given to understand the relation of art to the time and place of its creation. August persists in his craft, even though the age demands crude and lewd imitations, and his single-mindedness has led to inevitable loneliness. The story proceeds as a richly rewarding, rigorously cerebral play of ideas, and for a while at least the notions of August's sage employer win out. He knows "that the world of modern commerce"—the reality August tries to avoid—"obeyed one all-embracing principle: novelty. This principle was divisible into two laws: novelty is necessary, and novelty never lasts." He could be describing the literary marketplace today.

[10] IN THE PENNY ARCADE, by *Steven Millhauser*. Alfred A. Knopf. $14.95.

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WILLIAM H. PRITCHARD

Love Story

PETER GAY'S GENERAL INTRODUCTION to what will be a five-volume study of—in his words—"the bourgeois experience," explained that the first volume, *Education of the Senses* (1984) would examine "the bourgeois sensual life" while the volume to follow[1] would

> explore theories of love; the cultural fantasies that the fiction of the age enshrined; the disguises that erotic desire could assume in the so-called higher realms of culture; the forms of loving that divines called sinful and psychiatrists perverse; and the price that bourgeois constraints on sexuality exacted, or were thought to exact from the middle classes.

Since in his view the bourgeois experience from Victoria to Freud demanded nothing less than a "symphonic" treatment, Mr. Gay sees himself as, above all else, an orchestrator who needs enormous space and leisure adequately to shape the "rich material" so variously illustrated by the lives and writings of Western European, English and American men and women over the course, more or less, of a century.

The presiding genius of the whole enterprise is Freud, and in *Freud for Historians* (1985), a smaller book (a mere 252 pages) sandwiched between the first two large volumes of *The Bourgeois Experience*, Mr. Gay reveals that ten years ago he entered the Western New England Institute for Psychoanalysis as a "research candidate." This "fascinating" experience only made him more professionally aware of how useful Freud could be—and was not being permitted to be—for his brothers and sisters in the historical profession. *Freud for Historians* argued for a more thoughtful canvassing of the uses of psychoanalysis in the individual historian's project; it is "history informed by psychoanalysis," rather than "psychohistory" that Gay sees himself as writing in his massive work in progress. At times Freud's legacy "informs" Gay's history in a familiar, perhaps too-familiar way, as when (in *Education of the Senses*) a nineteenth-century American diarist, Lester Ward, racked with unconsummated desires toward his fiancée, notes that "I strained to push my steel pen into my pencil case a moment ago, and it became stuck so that I

[1] THE BOURGEOIS EXPERIENCE: VICTORIA TO FREUD; Volume II: The Tender Passion, by *Peter Gay*. Oxford University Press. $24.95.

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broke my pencil case to get it loose." Comments Mr. Gay: "The steel pen was obviously not the only pointed object that Ward wanted to activate, the pencil case not the only thing he wanted to break." Heh-heh. There are a few such too-knowing moments in the history when one wishes for the presence of a commentator named, say, Vladimir Nabokov.[2] But compared to some of his predecessors in the mode, Gay is discreet and humane in his analyses.

A more essential and immediate problem for the reader is what to *do* with all the rich detail Mr. Gay is concerned to orchestrate. Taking the "symphonic" analogy seriously, we love and admire the skill, in Haydn or Brahms or Tchaikovsky, with which themes are treated and developed through individual sequences of movements and through the succession of movements which is the entire symphony. With Bruckner, by contrast (and unless one is Winthrop Sargeant), we may grumble and shut off the radio or phonograph: the material has been pushed around at too great a length in too portentous a manner. Peter Gay is a case of the writer who cannot bear to leave anything out, and his sequences within individual volumes and from one volume to the next, are difficult to tease out. In one of the few really critical reviews *Education of the Senses* received, Paul Johnson (*Commentary*, June 1984) admitted that Gay's manner was engaging and that he had a sharp eye for good quotations and examples, but went on to say that "Nevertheless, at bottom this book is a lot of miscellaneous information chasing a subject." I do not think he would revise his estimate in the light of this successor volume.

Paul Johnson also pointed out that Gay's method of writing history, which derives in part from the French *Annales* school of "total history" (Marc Bloch is the distinguished progenitor) has in some of its practitioners, such as Fernand Braudel, been "characterized by pretentiousness and flatulence." "Its greatest weakness," Johnson argued, at the risk of seeming pedantic, is "the lack of a chronological framework. History without chronology tends to degenerate into fuzzy anecdotage." Peter Gay is seldom pretentious, and only occasionally flatulent; but the lack of chronology means that one never really knows what is going to come next. (The first volume begins with the erotic life of Mabel Loomis Todd, c. the 1880s in America; the second, in its first chapter, considers early-nineteenth-century "treatises" on love by Stendhal and Balzac, in 1820s France.) This refusal to honor chronology may have something to do with Gay's preference for the symphonic treatment, but it does run the risk of anecdotage, anecdotes too often told at too great length.

[2] "Freudism and all it has tainted with its grotesque implications and methods appears to me to be one of the vilest deceits practiced by people on themselves and on others. I reject it utterly, along with a few other medieval items still adored by the ignorant, the conventional, or the very sick." (Vladimir Nabokov, *Strong Opinions*, 1973.)

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An example from the first volume is Mabel Todd, whose journals provide the basis for almost forty pages of treatment. It may be that, as a resident of Amherst, indeed an owner of a house that Mrs. Todd built and stored her mahogany furniture in, I am peculiarly resistant to the lady's charms. But when in a chapter well along in the new volume, titled "Stratagems of Sensuality" (in which Gay goes about showing how such stratagems as music, food, and nature served as substitutes for sexual expression among the bourgeoisie) Mabel Todd comes back for another turn on the boards, I found my heart sinking. "There is happiness amounting to ecstasy in being on the long white beach, with lines of breakers rolling up in foam, the sun glittering on the little waves out to sea and the blessed east wind blowing health into one's face, an ecstasy which I have never experienced under any other circumstances, but which is faintly suggested to me by seeing white steam come out of a pipe or chimney against the blue sky." Immediately Mr. Gay, Detector of Symbols, goes to work: ". . . her unconscious phallic fantasies breaking through with her association to pipes and chimneys emitting steam, hint at the sexual charge that participating in the world of nature and machines gave her." Well, O.K., if you must. But there is more, much more of the diarist: "Do you hear the crickets, *our* crickets, my beloved, at twilight? And when you hear them do you think of me? I sat on the east piazza last evening listening to them, and again in front of the house, until it seems to me you *must* be with me. Do you hear them sweetheart?" Those crickets, Mr. Gay tells us, are "emblems of bliss remembered and hopes betrayed": and Mabel Todd's "erotic mode of assimilating nature . . . explodes, with little rocket showers of joy and pathos" in the course of her love affair with Emily Dickinson's brother. The historian of the bourgeois experience loves Mrs. Todd, because he can use her as contradictory evidence to the cliché about how all Victorians, especially women, suffered from repression: here was a woman, likely one of many men and women, who actively enjoyed and cultivated, through "stratagems of sensuality" and through the thing itself, an erotic life. The trouble is that Mr. Gay doesn't imagine the possibility of looking at the whole Mabel Loomis Todd story with something less than reverence; that a little of it goes a very long way; that a reader of Evelyn Waugh, not to say Terry Southern, might be less than captivated by the whole throbbing affair.

It may sound arrogant, obtuse, or both to complain that a historian's tone is not ironic enough about its subject and subjects. (By irony I do not mean the too-knowing Freudian reading of the steel pen-and-pencil case moment quoted earlier from Lester Ward's diary.) But Mr. Gay has invested so much energy in being, always, a sympathetic reader of every diarist or letter writer, man or woman, from W.E. Gladstone at the helm of empire, to Mabel Burrows at St. Margaret's School in Waterbury, Connecticut, in love with her

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schoolmate Mary Dennison—that for fear of scoring off his subjects through irony (perhaps with the contrary example of Lytton Strachey in mind), he becomes overprotective of them. Eros in all its manifestations is thus regarded with too much reverence. So his final plea in this second volume is that we "once again learn to read them [the Victorian middle classes] if we wish to recapture that particular mixture of sensuality and shy reticence, and the subtle, poignant compromises between drives and defenses with which they regulated their loves in imagination and in life." Granted there is always a swell in any book's final sentence, but this one seems to me "overdetermined" (a favorite Freudian word of Gay's) with its "subtle," its "poignant," its "drives and defenses." Strachey was less warm-hearted, and a better writer.

As a practitioner of "total history"—if it is fair to saddle him with the phrase—Mr. Gay has to be ready, calmly, to handle everything: there is nothing that is not grist for his mill. Perhaps the most important form of expression he deals with in *The Tender Passion* is the novel, and not only in England. In his approach to novels he sounds quite aware of what he is and is not doing, noting at the beginning of his chapter "The Work of Fiction" that he is "writing neither literary criticism nor literary history, neither appraising style nor assigning merit." Rather, he is "solely concerned here with the portrayal of love in nineteenth-century fiction." Does he realize how that seemingly innocuous claim is bound to set the literary critic's teeth on edge, brought up to distrust such presumed neutrality—to style, treatment, merit—as the refuge of a sociologist or something worse? His assumption, it soon becomes clear, is that he is as free to characterize the erotic life of someone in a novel, as he is when the someone is a real person writing in her journal, or in a letter to a beloved. Sometimes, it seems, freer. His inclination is to believe that the written record of bourgeois erotic life "is far different, in fact, far more tepid, than that experience itself." Yet he can't get inside the bedroom to ascertain whether Walter and Eliza Bagehot had a really satisfactory relationship. (They had plenty of intellectual companionship but also frequent headaches, so "whether they enjoyed one another's bodies as they enjoyed one another's minds must remain a question.") But with Edward Casaubon, that memorable figure in George Eliot's *Middlemarch*, Mr. Gay is ready to give us the whole scoop on the man's lack of sexual contact with his (in Eliot's word) "ardent" young wife Dorothea. For Mr. Gay, Casaubon is a "disastrous first husband, the sterile pedant . . . who seems to have been quite as impotent in bed as he was at his desk." *Seems*? . . . I know not *seems*. Has it occurred to Gay that behind George Eliot's words there *is* no bedroom in which Casaubon did not perform? By talking this way about literary character, he shows how not doing "literary criticism" is disabling to his credibility as a describer of Eliot's portrayal of love or its absence.

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Often in the chapter on fiction, as elsewhere, Gay's passion for getting everything in, using every one of his notecards, makes for the kind of omnibus one doesn't much want to ride on. A paragraph informs us that "Serious nineteenth-century fiction . . . undertook critical, pointed investigation of society" (so what else is new?), quotes Henry James on the Novel's virtue being its "air of reality (solidity of specification)," and says that "love" is a principal ingredient in that reality (again, who would disagree?). He then "proves" his point by citing titles from Balzac, Zola, de Maupassant, then says it wasn't only the French who recognized this: "Henry James's *Wings of the Dove* and Trollope's *Phineas Finn* show lovemaking to be essentially a political game and, conversely, politics often an erotic sport—for high stakes." There is no "politics" in *The Wings of the Dove*, unless I missed it, and I don't see why these totally different novels should be jammed together. The paragraph rolls along, embracing Eça de Queiros, Mrs. Gaskell, Melville and Twain, but adds up to no more than what Paul Johnson accused Gay's earlier volume of being—"a lot of miscellaneous information chasing a subject." And some of the individual bits of "information"—as with the yoking of James and Trollope—stand up to close inspection in only the most superficial way.

At one point, apropos of Thomas Bridgeman's *Florist Guide*, a book designed for the "softer sex" which concludes with a postscript comparing marriage to a "garden," Mr. Gay says: "It may seem heavy-handed to read this largely irrelevant postscript to a sensible guide as an extended metaphor for sexual intercourse or sexual panic." In fact, as he shows by extended quotation from the florid document, his reading is perfectly justified and entertaining as well. Where the heavy-handedness comes in is in description like the following of what reading fiction involves. The full battery of Freudian terms is hauled out:

> The work of reading calls upon all the principal institutions of the mind: it teases the id by counterfeiting instinctual satisfactions, flatters the ego with formal beauties, soothes the superego in enlisting the reader in an invisible moral community where the wicked and the innocent receive their due . . . or where suffering comes to all as man's lot.

Isn't this faculty psychology, come back with a vengeance, conjuring up an experience so abstract, so remote from anyone's reading of an actual novel, that it seems merely perverse, or merely an example of the theorist's cleverness? When a particular novel, and a great one, comes under the Freudian glass, the results are even more painful:

> Anna Karenina's suicide, a pathetic mixture of despair and revenge, of obedience to a punitive superego, and rebellion against

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> intolerable narcissistic injuries, was the final act of a transgression in the realm, and under the impulsion, of Eros.

So *that's* what it was! we are invited to breathe. Anna's suicide of course brings the railroad to Mr. Gay's mind, so this "favorite actor in the theater of libido" takes a bow, first in something called *Auch Einer* by Friedrich Theodor Vischer, then in Dickens, whose writing about Mr. Dombey on the train ("Away, with a shriek, and a roar, and a rattle," etc.) has, predictably, "something erotic about it." We are even treated to Freud's hoary old thing from *Three Essays on Sexuality* about how "every boy, at least, has at some time in his life wanted to be an engine driver or a coachman." (I never wanted to be an engine driver, and I never even thought of being a coachman—or am I repressing something?) Once again, Nabokov's is the voice one yearns for here.

As with the earlier volume, *The Tender Passion* concludes with a "Biographical Essay" forty-six pages long, mentioning every book, article, and person Mr. Gay has consulted, and telling us what he thinks of each item.[3] Like the index, the book itself is an enormous Chinese dinner (except that it doesn't taste so good piece by piece) after completing which the reader soon wonders where it all went, what substance it left behind. Perhaps no more than what we knew already, that—in the book's truest sentence—"It all depended."

[3] This produces some very odd couplings indeed: "William Empson's *Seven Types of Ambiguity* (1931), and the perceptive study of Walter Muschg, *Psychoanalyse und Literaturwissenschaft* (1930) retain much of their authority." Frequently Gay uses the word "magisterial" to describe someone else's book, and would probably welcome its application to *The Bourgeois Experience*.

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LIAM RECTOR

Poetry Chronicle

ELEGIES[1] IS THE SIXTH BOOK OF POEMS by the Scottish Poet Douglas Dunn. Since the auspicious publication of his first book, *Terry Street*, in 1969, Dunn has gone on to develop a poetry much akin to the best work of Robert Lowell. A kind of lunatic control and compression mark his poetics, one which underscores and vivisects the drama which occurs just where our public and private lives most collide. Like Lowell, Dunn has an eye for the styles and manners which bespeak class, the drama of class (or that wonderfully put phrase, all but assigned to cartoon status now, "class conflict"), and he has attuned his poems to that nervous system within individuals through which all this emanates, breaks down or rises. Unlike Lowell's, Dunn's vantage point in viewing class has been from the perspective of those who have never owned land, who are entertained-to-death by the vagaries of pop culture (which Dunn dissects with a particularly harsh eye), and whose rise in or transcendence of class comes, if it comes at all, usually through the culture of books, as with the scholarship boy or girl. The owners, the authorities, and the professional class who carry out their policies are all eviscerated by Dunn in a seminal poem from his fourth book, *Barbarians,* "The Come-on." In that poem a "culture of connivance," uttering credentials and ruling in a 'disinterested tradition', is powerfully unmasked, in a manner which would have made even Brecht shudder.

Within a poetry which has always been deeply personal while at the same time acutely political (arguing with itself, arguing with others, synthesizing Yeats's contraries), a poetry willing and able to "risk all privacies to make life said," Dunn now offers these elegies written after the death of his wife in 1981. The potential for self-pity and mawkishness hovers everywhere about *Elegies*, but is nowhere indulged. Instead, and there is here an enlarging of Pound's notion that "only emotion endures," we have a collection of poems of a great intelligence and dignity, a truly heartbreaking book under the spell of loss and healing. Dunn's wife was a photographer who we learn in the book died apparently from some cancer of the eye, and his tale of widowhood is haunted by many of the things they once saw together and the times through which they endured. In this profound meditation of marriage there is often a high ro-

[1] ELEGIES, by *Douglas Dunn*. Faber & Faber. £3.95p.

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mantic tone, with the occasional "my love" or "my lady," but this is an antiquity perfectly placed here, without irony and acting to echo the role of time, place, and especially the thinking river of memory which runs through and in effect grounds these poems. Isolated within that grief most difficult to render common, Dunn manages to transcend what's altogether solitary about it and make it *our* grief, our privilege to consider for "Men and women, / Who, one day, will feel as I feel now."

Time forms the structure of the book and Dunn holds and moves time masterfully as the poems mount through "days of grief / Before the grief," when people visit his ailing wife—they are often more in need of consolation than consoling—through the bureaucracy of death, the making of "arrangements," and on to the days which prefigure his return to the household after a time of travel. Alain Resnais, that master of time in film, couldn't have sung it better. Chronology is thrown somewhat to the wind in the mind which thinks these poems, as it is in any acute remembering, and a truer sense of the thrust of time eventually emerges and sees this book, this passage through.

Like Lowell in full tilt, Dunn is also capable of splicing into a poem voices, quotations, which are often the voice of time itself, as in the poem "Tursac":

> Her pleasure whispered through a much-kissed smile.
> "Oh, rock me firmly at a gentle pace."
> My love had lusty eagerness and style.
> Propriety she had, preferring grace
> Because she saw more virtue in its wit,
> Convinced right conduct should have some glamour in it
> Or look good to an educated eye,
> And never more than in those weeks of France
> Perfected into rural elegance,
> Those nights in my erotic memory.
> I call that little house our *Thébaïde*
> (The literary French!), and see her smile,
> Then hear her in her best sardonic style:
> "Write out of me, not out of what you read."

And again, as with Lowell's startling "My mind's not right," Dunn has a talent for interruption within a poem, and will juxtapose with the most elegant utterances such phrases as "I loved my wife" or "Why be discreet? A broken heart is what I have." These collisions, these interventions act to underscore perfectly, to up the ante on the arc of the drama here. I'd like to go on quoting interminably, quote the entirety of *Elegies* in fact, but I can only urge this singular book upon American readers. As I say this, I'm aware of the difficulties some will have in securing a book from Faber; the same ser-

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vice Random House provided in making available the fine work of British poet James Fenton should likewise be rendered to Dunn's selected work. I go by way of Lowell only in suggesting an *entrée* into Dunn's work. Dunn's is very much his own voice, and *Elegies* marks a high point in his life's work.

The American poet Stephen Dunn's *Local Time*,[2] also his sixth book, is one wherein the persistent themes of Dunn's previous work are brought to a crucial culmination, and there is here the infamous holy wedlock of form and content, the excitement of a poet (we might have said in less self-conscious times) finding his voice. Like Reed Whittemore in a previous generation and Robert Pinsky in Dunn's own, Dunn has sought to speak for the middle class, in terms of the often troublesomely contented wage earners, the suburbs or provinces in which they most often find themselves, and the things, the objects which in particular ways figure their lives together. Where Whittemore consistently uses irony to undercut his anarchic liberalism, his wry sense of his audience, their glory and predicament, where Pinsky, especially in his first two books, would throw in the woks, stereos, Girl Scouts (the entire kit and kaboodle) and speak from a kind of wise-guy mirth, Dunn's voice in *Local Time* is somewhere between W. C. Williams' this-micrososm-is-the-world and Louis Simpson's sprightly, plain-spoken narratives. I go to the trouble of establishing these parameters to note what I take to be an ongoing tradition in post-World War II American poetry: the kind of domestic poetry, by both men and women, which takes the "mass-class" sounds and concerns of America seriously. One doesn't find the bard-as-burning-bush voice of alienation and rapture one hears so well (and differently) in the best work of Ginsberg and Grossman, nor the disassociative detachment of the Eliot line (up to "Four Quartets," that is) in this work, but rather the direct attempt to sympathize with, go towards, and finally enter and embody that world wherein reign house, family, neighborhood, job, retirement plan—a stance which speaks for all this in a manner that assumes this world might be, in fact *is* Up To Something, rather than tragically away or misbegotten.

When I say *Local Time* is a "culmination" for Dunn, I mean that it is a rising, an apex, an arc of achieved mastery within this tone, this obsession. When I first read it I had that hair-rising-at-the-back-of-the-neck feeling that Here It Is, another *They Feed They Lion*, or *Book of Nightmares*.

Repeated readings calmed this intuition down. Not that *Local Time* is less of an achievement, actually, but rather that it rests in that atmosphere where paradoxically its ambitions are more modest, its humility more endless, and I'd say its task even more difficult. So I let it simmer. . . . What the book does announce is a road

[2] LOCAL TIME, by *Stephen Dunn*. William Morrow & Company, Inc. $14.95.

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sign and achieved dwelling-place for the generation of American poets now in their forties.

Unlike Dunn's previous books, where a world was always being hammered away at, *made*, yet blemished by the merely "written" poem and its ensuing creation of an unevenness by which so many books are marred if not damned, *Local Time* has not a weak poem in it and is a seamless progression, a good read, in fact a "subway read" in the best sense of that phrase. What a triumph these poems are for the dream of an art which can exist alongside the day's written headlines and the sound of a broad, largely unspoken life. To put it another way, these are poems that would move your local grocer (if not your national chain store) to extend your credit indefinitely, for having spoken the local life so well.

But I veer too much from the book at hand. There are many wonderful poems about the relation of men and women, particularly within the high-context sphere of marriage, and I'll commit here the sin of choosing one which can in a review be quoted whole, "Honor":

> Because in any relationship the wrongs accumulate,
> because each of us has the goods,
> the bad goods, on the other—
>
> how to leave closed the historical wound
> when a new argument begins, how
> when anger reaches
>
> back into its arsenal, to come forward
> with, if not a rose,
> then at least
>
> the knife that's never been used,
> which shines a little
> as it does its terrible work.

Here Dunn recreates, in form and movement, the pressures and hesitations to be paid for any such abiding loyalty and knowledge. The primary stanzaic unit of many of the poems in the book is the tercet, and it's a tercet Dunn has here made into a complete signature. In other poems, such as "After the Argument," Dunn writes convincingly of a marital sex which "was a knot / untying itself, a prolonged / coming loose." This circle of union and estrangement extends also into the wider world wherein the speaker and his wife witness their daughter going off for a week of arts and crafts at a Christian school, and coming home a convert to a house of unbelievers:

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. . . But when she came home
singing "Jesus loves me,
the Bible tells me so," it was time to talk.
Could we say Jesus

doesn't love you? Could I tell her the Bible
is a great book certain people use
to make you feel bad? We sent her back
without a word.

It has been so long since we believed, so long
since we needed Jesus
as our nemesis and friend, that we thought he was
sufficiently dead,

that our children would think of him like Lincoln
or Thomas Jefferson.
Soon it became clear to us: you can't teach disbelief
to a child,

only wonderful stories, and we hadn't a story
nearly as good . . .

Frederick Pollack does have a story "nearly as good," and *The Adventure*,[3] his first published book, is a true romp into death's dream kingdom, an afterlife reminiscent of the *The Divine Comedy* minus a Virgil, and in spirit glancingly akin to Edward Dorn's *Slinger* (included is even a trusty steed, Juggernaut). Pollack's tale, a single book-length narrative, is a poem of considerable invention, with a seriousness buoyed by philosophical wit—an ambitious poem which is literary and intellectual entertainment of a high order. It's not what Donald Hall would call easy listenin' poetry; it's not plain style or conversational/colloquial verse. Here we inhabit the other side, a world where one gets the body one wants by wishing, willing it to be so, lives in the time one wants, and inhabits a domain (heaven, hell, or otherwise—no one quite knows) which is sunless, has different laws of mass and matter, and where there is always the chance of finally conversing with Freud, Wittgenstein, Marx, or Kierkegaard. In its references to these figures and their perspectives *The Adventure* takes the trouble to *embody* the meaning of any literary or philosophical allusion *within* the poem, and therein the poem opens out to even a staunchly "unliterary" reader.

The tercet is the single, sustained unit in this book also, and it is put to use artfully, in consort with its subject, and is as solidly

[3] THE ADVENTURE, by *Frederick Pollack*. Story Line Press. $15.00; $8.00.

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turned as was the stanza of Ammons in *Sphere*. Narrative though the infrastructure is, this is essentially a poem of sensibility and imagination. The narrative is a convenience, a ride from which the reader can and will depart in savoring the suggestive situations, characters, and details. There's a yuppie perspective at work here in part, replete with hippie-bashing and loving the newly acquired Braun coffee machine, but there is little of the Berkeley-gone-Silicon-Valley identity crisis which so mires what could be called the yuppie penchant for attaching its emergency to its objects. There are sexual scenes which are beautifully rendered, and they exist alongside a troubling, unexamined misogyny I found running throughout the book in company with some truly poignant delineations of relationship. I've found that the poem is impossible to excerpt—its beauty is to be found in its many one-liners and it's the motion of things which carries the poem. *The Adventure* is an amazing story, one which if it didn't teach me disbelief at least suspended what disbelief I'm capable of, and for a first book to have such unity, such managed pressure and style is of course, as the old saw goes, rare.

Linda Gregg's *Alma*,[4] following on the heels of her magnificent first book, *Too Bright to See*, confronts the reader with the reality of the second book itself, that "follow-up" to the philosophical world of which a first book announces a kind of birth. There are venerable traditions for a second book: the noble failure wherein the reach exceeds the grasp, the mining of different terrain altogether, and the further honing of a language and prosody until all that is inessential is burned away. I think the latter in *Alma*, has been Linda Gregg's way. At first glance it might appear that many previous rhetorics and tropes are being reiterated, and in fact they are, but the poem of the book itself, the voice which reverberates in the reader when the book is put down, signals a clear, if not major, advance in Gregg's work. The development of her poetry so far has much in common with what we've seen of the poems of Mark Strand as they move from book to book—the honing of a vocabulary, the telling and untelling, built upon repetition and always threatened by the impingements of self-influence, in which a primary world is hovered about relentlessly. Gregg also shares with Strand a kind of self-dramatizing which is evaporative, erasive, and often leaves the speaker adrift in context itself:

> Far is where I am near.
> Far is where I live.
> My house is in the far.
> The night is still.
> A dog barks from a farm.

[4] ALMA, by *Linda Gregg*, Random House. $7.95p.

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A tiny dog not far below.
The lamp keeps the stars away.
If I go out there they are.

"Up they walk, / up into the tall gown of the mountain that shows / her nakedness passionate." This kind of inversion, never contrived or distracting, is a Gregg signature, at once in her work both an idiom and a syntax. Her elliptical, often fragmented phrasing is often not unlike George Oppen's microscopic eye and rendering, and her gnarled repetitions in other poems are like some of the best in Weldon Kees.

Alma herself is the same Alma of *Too Bright to See*, and Gregg here returns to some of the themes of infidelity, the marriage gone and the possible marriage to come, that have haunted her work from the outset. Though not a narrative book of quest in the obvious manner that Pollack's is, *Alma* is a pilgrim's progress, a ruthless voyage, whether perched on an island or deep in a city. In "Not Saying Much," Gregg looks at photographs of her father (an impulse which is elsewhere inspiring some very tedious poems these days) and the images of "men together in the old pictures":

. . . They were interested
mostly in how men were men. Muscle and size . . .

After noting that being together once "made the men believe somehow," Gregg turns to the marriage of that time:

. . . They married women
the way they made a living. And the women
married them back, without saying much,
not loving much, not singing ever.
Those I knew in California lived and died
in beauty and not enough money . . .

These men were interested in how men were men and so is Gregg. She is also interested in how women are women and what the two are to one another. Without presumption and with no party line, Gregg, better than any poet I know, goes to the heart of the longing and repulsion, the can't-live-with and can't-live-without, which connects men and women, and does so in a language (and a movement of language) which is entirely her own. And her fragments, powerfully accumulated again in *Alma*, remain "strong enough / to be happy in the elements."

Another strong second book, following his *For the Sleepwalkers*, is Edward Hirsch's *Wild Gratitude*.[5] Despite the wonderfully strong

[5] WILD GRATITUDE, by *Edward Hirsch*. Alfred A. Knopf. $14.95; $7.95.

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sentiment and intelligence of the first book, I often detected a reliance on adjectives to act as poetic buzz-words, deflating the surge of the voice and rendering a kind of predictable straining after affability. There is little of that in *Wild Gratitude*. Here the sentence and its rushing forth, its proceeding, is still the same basic unit of Hirsch's poetic, but he is much more in command of the material and of the urgencies within each adjective.

One of the most moving poems in the book is "Omen," where the speaker is initially lying on moist grass and drifting into a half-sleep:

> And I can't stop thinking about my closest friend
>
> Suffering from cancer in a small, airless ward
> In a hospital downtown. At 37 he looks
> Boyish and hunted, fingered by illness, scared.
>
> When I was a boy the summer nights were immense—
> Clear as a country lake, pure, bottomless.
> The stars were like giant kites, casting loose . . .

The poem ends:

> I know that my closest friend is going to die
> And I can feel the dark sky tilting on one wing,
> Shuddering with rain, coming down around me.

Hirsch's sense of innocence often turns to this "When I was a boy" to take measure of the senseless waning of continuity which adult experience imposes. In *Wild Gratitude*, Hirsch returns to that noosphere which in these poems is the transition, often seen as the impossible impasse, between these two worlds—the vigil of dusk, that other shore of insomnia:

> At this hour the soul is like a yellow wing
> slipping through the treetops, a little ecstatic
> cloud hovering over the sidewalks, calling out
> to the approaching night, "Amaze me, amaze me,"
>
> while the body sits glumly by the window
> listening to the clear summons of the dead
> transparent as glass, clairvoyant as crystal . . .
> Some nights it is almost ready to join them.

Hirsch's poetry is a poetry of great empathy and sympathy, with many of the strengths and occasional weaknesses found in the work of Gerald Stern. Where characters and scenes are cleaved to for

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their realism and passion, specific to their details, Hirsch's is a poetry which speaks heartbreakingly for what's common, what's binding (even with the isolation of the insomniac) within the tribe. When his work occasionally veers off into the sputtering engine of a soft visionary stance, the adjectives working like amiable pistons, it can fall short. Hirsch must sense this, for *Wild Gratitude* is a remarkable maturing and has a cohesive sense of restraint in its baroque effusiveness. There are many remarkable individual poems, including "The Night Parade" ("whores adjusting their uniforms"), "Curriculum Vitae" (perhaps the form of our decade?), "Wild Gratitude," and many others. When Hirsch speaks of the poor, or of the lost and losing, his connection is never sentimental but rather harks back to Frank O'Hara's saying "The poor have me always with them."

I've long debated with myself the use of reviewing a book in which I see little merit, and have finally decided that there are certain cases when it should be done—for example, when a seemingly unanimous "critical consent" and congratulation surrounds the appearance of a book which I find vacuous. The alternative is to settle comfortably into an if-you-can't-say-anything-nice-don't-say-anything-at-all literary culture in which a savage indifference, a polite silence and ignoring, as far as print is concerned, accompanies a sometimes backbiting and insidious 'word of mouth' response to a book. That said, I'm baffled, after reading Brad Leithauser's *Cats of the Temple*,[6] to know why his work has received such a consensus of unadulterated praise, along with the reflexive chain of adulation which extends to the work of Amy Clampitt and a few others commonly thought to be ushering in "the new formalism." I'm wary of doing Mr. Leithauser the injustice of reviewing-the-reviewers or responding to the reputation rather than the poems at hand, so let me dive immediately into one of the poems which typically represent one aspect of *Cats of the Temple*, the "Minim" called "That Trojan Horse," quoted whole here:

> It pretty much stinks,
> though it may be only human—
> the way Man looks at Woman
> and secretly thinks,
> You've got to believe
> it's better to give than to receive.

This is not light verse; it's *lite* verse, an object wherein the package has more substance than the ingredients inside. And I find this to hold true of most of Leithauser's work in this volume. Mind-numbing descriptions, like weak Marianne Moore, haunt and disrupt any arrival at a poem which goes beyond the "playing with

[6] CATS OF THE TEMPLE, by *Brad Leithauser*. Alfred A. Knopf. $14.95; $7.95.

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words" Auden once advocated. As amusing as Auden's contrary was, it was a false one: for the serious poet (including any of serious wit) there is never a choice between having-something-to-say and finding, through play and struggle, the words with which to say it or have it said. And our most serious poets, from Molly Peacock to Robert Creeley, have found a *synthesis* between expressionism and formal wiles. In *Cats of the Temple* this seriousness is seriously lacking, and we find instead a verse at a painterly remove from its as yet stillborn life and voices, aswoon in a surface it does not penetrate and for which it cannot speak. For a workable definition of "creative writing," in its most lacking sense, I'd also look to characteristic lines such as these:

> Deliberate
> on the rabbit,
> who if what you
> hear is half true
> has found the way
> to inhabit
> a world without
> elaborate
> courtship, yet one
> flushed with piquant
> concupiscent
> satisfaction . . .

Aside from sounding inept, this excerpt writes its way into what most amazes, bores, and finally annoys me about this book—its triviality. "Nothing is too trivial to be noticed," said one reviewer, and I'll go along with that. A few poems, "Gregg's Place" among them, do manage to evoke the contours of a world, but more often the problem is that what's trivial remains trivial and pulsates, with a lumbering movement, inside its triviality. Pound was right—technique *is* the test of a poet's sincerity. But within the low-context bric-a-brac, tourist poems of *Cats of the Temple* there's little that's sincere (or camp) enough to announce that this verse has yet made its way into the kingdom of poetry.

With George Oppen gone, I look now to the work of Creeley, Strand, and Charles Simic to provide the weight of an absolute spareness. (In my own generation, writers now in their thirties, I look to the work of Michael Burkard and Linda Gregg for much the same thing.) Here not only is poetry "the best possible words in the best possible order," utterly shorn of anything which doesn't, as Pound demanded, "contribute directly to the presentation," but it has also the presence of what's absent, a sound of spareness that goes beyond mere economy and brevity and is always at the gates of

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the unsayable—as Beckett always is. Charles Simic's *Selected Poems*[7] has recently appeared and triumphantly illustrates what such a book can offer the old admirer, the new fan. It includes selections from all the Braziller books published from 1967 to 1982, as well as a revised version of *White*, published in 1972 by New Rivers, and *Weather Report for Utopia and Vicinity*, a collection of previously unpublished work published in 1983 by Station Hill Press.

About half way through the book we find these lines, from "The Lesson":

> It occurs to me now
> that all these years
> I have been
> the idiot pupil
> of a practical joker.
>
> Diligently
> and with foolish reverence
> I wrote down
> what I took to be
> his wise pronouncements
> concerning
> my life on earth . . .

Simic's *Selected* is in many ways just this: the village idiot (with the tone of the pupil) has listened to an immense practical joke which contained a mock-foolish wisdom. It's a considerable and considered wisdom indeed, one often taking on the voice of "An abstract street / on which an equally abstract intelligence / forever advances, doubting / the sound of its own footsteps." Simic's legendary gallows humor gallops like a riderless horse throughout this book, and its somberness, wisdom, and insane laughs are everywhere present:

> I can't get any peace around here:
> The bread on its artificial limbs,
> A headless doll in a wheelchair,
> And my mother, mind you, using
> Two knives for crutches as she squats to pee.
> "A Landscape With Crutches"

> A bedbug who suffers, who has doubts
> About his existence. The miraculous
> Laughing dove. A thousand-year-old turtle
> Playing billiards. A chicken who

[7] SELECTED POEMS: 1963–1983, by *Charles Simic*. George Braziller. $8.95p.

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Cuts his own throat, who bleeds.

The trainer with his sugar-cubes,
With his chair and whip. The evenings
When they all huddle in a cage,
Smoking cheap cigars, lazily
Marking the cards in the new deck.
"Animal Acts"

Simic's poetry is a kind of philosophical insomnia, one wherein the present is noted and remembered but soon floats off into the formulas and imaginings of history and the unlikeliness of the future . . . The imagination in these poems, which I think takes as its source *innocence*, is continually taking its first look at a first world, reacting with both awe and horror, wisdom and austerity. This imagination has done a great deal to animate the supposedly inanimate, in poems like "Fork," "My Shoes," "Ax," "Brooms," and many others which now figure a kind of 'surrealism' for their time; but in addition, and this the *Selected* makes painfully obvious, Simic's work has about it a purity, an originality unmatched by many of his contemporaries.

"White," a book-length poem, is a welcome inclusion in its re-edited form. A helpful and hilarious discussion of that poem, with George Starbuck, is included in *The Uncertain Certainty*,[8] a collection of interviews, essays, and notes on Simic's poetry, by Simic himself, recently published in The University of Michigan's "Poets on Poetry" series. It's a useful companion volume to the *Selected*, and collects many of the few prose pieces Simic has written and published. One would hope there will be more of this from Simic. His essay, "Negative Capability and Its Children," is an important *entrée* into his work and into the whole of contemporary poetry. As Robert McDowell said in his recent review of the Michigan series (THE HUDSON REVIEW, Autumn 1985), "the mum generation was always talking," and these interviews and scattered prose pieces are all we have from some of the most powerful poets of our day. The shadow of the New Criticism and "The Age of Criticism" was a long one, one which I think eventually discouraged analysis and prose elucidation in the generation immediately following it, and we're all a little poorer for that, inevitable though it now seems to have been.

"Surrealistic" and "deep image" are terms which no longer begin to describe what poets like Simic and Thomas Lux are up to. Lux's poem, "Elegy for Frank Stanford," from his third book of poems, *Sunday*, is easily one of the finest poems published in the seventies, and its strengths, combining ingenuity and exactness of image with a powerful emotional base which is constantly shifting, are even

[8] THE UNCERTAIN CERTAINTY, by *Charles Simic*. The University of Michigan Press. $8.95p.

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more present in his most recent collection, *Half Promised Land.*[9] With the linguistic panache of Bill Knott and the ability to charge an image with a complete lyrical range—a characteristic also of the work of James Wright—Lux now reveals in his poems a moral center which has before been clouded by sheer precociousness. Money—what people do to make it, what it makes of them, and even what existed before it—is a running theme in this book, as in this excerpt from "Empty Pitchforks," which begins with the epigraph "There was poverty before money":

> There was debtors' prison before inmates,
> there was hunger prefossil,
>
> there was pain before a nervous system
> to convey it to the brain, there existed
>
> poverty before intelligence, or accountants,
> before narration; there was bankruptcy aswirl
>
> in nowhere, it was palpable
> where nothing was palpable, there was repossession
>
> in the gasses forming so many billion . . .

And in "A Tenth of a Cent a Stitch," Lux asks:

> . . . what *is* the percentage
> rich to poor?—eat a loaf of bread punched
> with holes, This is all around
> and in the history books—which pages
> you cannot eat. Never was I Communist—Marx
> and Engels own a string of shoestores
>
> for all I know, and probably do, that gouge
> the poor both here and in some land
> where the shoes by hand
> are sewn: one-tenth of a cent a stitch . . .

Odd to note the turn from asking what *is* the percentage to denying one's Communist affilations, even in a time of such renewed red-baiting as ours has become, and I find Lux's characterization of Marx and Engels (though perhaps apt, were it better done?) to be too easy, too cartoon-cute. But Lux does try and get to such matters as directly as possible, which I greatly admire, though I think it comes to more success in a poem like "The Swimming Pool," where

[9] HALF PROMISED LAND, by *Thomas Lux*. Houghton Mifflin Company. $13.95; $6.95.

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a young girl with no breasts joins a fat boy in taunting another of their companions:

> . . . She doesn't seem
> so happy. She is like
> the lower-middle class, that fatal group
> handed crumbs so they can drop a few
> down lower, to the poor, so they won't kill
> the rich. All around
> the apt. swimming pool
> there is what's everywhere: forsakenness
> and fear, a disdain for those beneath us
> rather than a rage
> against the ones above . . .

Passages such as this, as close as they veer to an agit-prop simplification, are redeemed by the specificity and context which Lux brings to them, in a time when many of his generation, for fear of attitudinizing or simply from an inability to see beyond themselves, affect a stoic and/or careerist indifference to such matters. Lest readers think this is the only kind of writing in *Half Promised Land*, let me assure you that Lux's customary energy, inventiveness, and humor are also abundantly present, though I feel they have all taken on an added dimension which I've tried to get to here. Lux tries his hand at poems that are end-rhymed and metrically poised, and the poem which ends the book is a ravaging account of the arriving at a faith in a "higher power."

There are three more books of poems I'd like to discuss briefly. Terence Winch's *Irish Musicians/American Friends*[10] is a kind of deadpan "anti-poetry," with a somewhat flat, reportorial tone, which chronicles a generation of Irish musicians who emigrated from Ireland in the 1920s and raised children in New York City who were themselves to become musicians; Winch delivers their milieu and progress perfectly. In a seemingly "artless" prosody, he sustains a surface of language from which a world and a history are artfully rendered, with unforgettable characters. Pound's dictum that more writing fails from lack of character than lack of talent suggests the strength of this work. The characters are fully drawn and the intelligence which informs their portraits is the voice of character itself.

Another book which could easily fall through the cracks of readers' attention is *The Key to the City*,[11] by Anne Winters. There is a Lazarus voice here, a voice "come to tell all," and it proceeds in a

[10] IRISH MUSICIANS/AMERICAN FRIENDS, by *Terence Winch*. Coffee House Press. $8.95p.

[11] THE KEY TO THE CITY, by *Anne Winters*. University of Chicago Press. $15.00; $6.95.

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dream language based on affect and impressionistic detail, rather than any narrative cause and effect. Winters has learned her lessons from Frank Bidart about how to "fasten the voice on the page," but has extricated herself from the oftentimes overpowering influence of Bidart by having a subject, New York City and in fact The City, which always threatens to, but does not finally, overpower her voyage within it. I found the final section of the book to be a falling away from the power of the riveting initial sequence, "The Ruins," but this is a small gripe. I lurch towards comparisons outside of literature, such as Martin Scorsese's New York in the film *Taxi Driver*, to find a vision comparable to Winters' scorching portrait of our international city.

Henry Taylor's *The Flying Change*[12] is another world altogether, and the power of this book comes, I take it, from its narrowing down to and focusing on a world of country living. The dramatic terrain of *The Flying Change* is not the all but vanished world of the small farm in Virginia, but rather the life of the gentleman agriculturist who leans against a fence, asking directions from an old farmer, one whose sons have all moved away, and hears, in that coexistence of all that moves and changes, "There are people dying today, he says / that never died before." It's "farm death" that haunts this book, both in the old-time sense of living among animals found dead upon the land, and the new recognition, a long time in the making, that a way of life for the human crowd and its small families is also vanishing and assuming other forms. Taylor has placed himself squarely in the traditions of both ways of life, and his achievement here is to preserve, in both life and literature, what he's found of worth in what continues "immobile in bright air, / sustained in time astride the flying change." This book operates powerfully within its ambitions, is poignant and wry by turns, and bespeaks a coming to full terms in Taylor's work.

[12] THE FLYING CHANGE, by *Henry Taylor*. Louisiana State University Press. $13.95; $6.95.

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MARVIN MUDRICK

He Wouldn't Babysit for Mozart

LEOPOLD MOZART, AS THESE LETTERS[1] SHOW, was of all things a disappointed father. He had high standards, and his son just didn't measure up to them. Leopold was an exemplary family man, honest, honorable, practical, prudent, brimming with axioms and directives for his wife and children, punctiliously mindful of their souls—he was a strict and admonitory Catholic—as well as their material interests; in the earlier years humorous and affectionate when he wasn't being overwhelmed with exasperation and self-pity by more and more proof of their shortcomings and omissions and malefactions. If only people did what they were told! But they never do. He mostly repels our sympathy, this pious man whose piety didn't serve to modify his bleak opinion of everybody in the world except himself; but W. J. Turner makes as much of a case for him as can be expected from a dependable biographer of the disappointing son:

> [Leopold] was a devout Catholic, . . . but one of his most characteristic utterances was the following: "Accept it as a universal truth that all men tell lies and add to the truth, or take away from it, just as it suits their purpose. Especially must we believe nothing which, if known, would add to the reputation of the speaker or flatter his interlocutor, for that is sure to be false."
>
> This saying, which is worthy of La Rochefoucauld and undeniably true, was not of much assistance to his son. Mozart . . . could see through men just as clearly as his father; there was nothing wrong with his head. What was wrong with him was his heart and his general sensibility, which was, indeed, extreme. The old Biblical utterance that the truly virtuous shall be light of heart, if applied to Mozart, would make him out to be one of the most virtuous of men, for his natural buoyancy and gaiety of heart were quite extraordinary.

Leopold warned and chided and inveighed, but Mozart wouldn't learn: he was ready to have a very good time wherever he happened to be despite what people told him they would unquestionably do but didn't, he made jokes and played parlor games and billiards, he wrote music, he trusted in whatever would happen next.

[1] THE LETTERS OF MOZART AND HIS FAMILY, ed. by *Emily Anderson*. W.W. Norton. Third Edition. $50.00.

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"Truly, I love him boundlessly," wrote the composer Johann Hasse, having become acquainted with the fifteen-year-old Mozart; but Leopold was already a drag: "The father, as far as I can see, is eternally discontented with everything." Devout, denunciatory, peripheral Leopold kept hammering away with one variant or another of his precious universal truth—"all men are villains!" he flings out with classic simplicity in a letter to his son—and at last felt honor bound to apply it to Mozart also, who, though a loving and attentive son, was too eagerly engaged in the world to behave like the bilious anchorite that Leopold might have applauded. On September 5, 1781, Mozart answers a letter from his father (whose letters to him had by the evidence of Mozart's replies become so furiously unjust that Mozart had stopped keeping them; but Leopold knew better than not to keep his son's): "From the way in which you have taken my last letter—as if I were an arch-scoundrel or a blockhead or both!—I am sorry to see that you rely more on the gossip and scribblings of other people than you do on me—and that in fact you have no trust in me whatever. . . . Do trust me always, for indeed I deserve it." ("Trust no one!" Leopold had once exclaimed; and at last he trusted only the rumor-mongers carrying back to him from Vienna the latest envious gossip about his son, who occupied himself seeing pupils and friends and prospective patrons and composing masterpieces by the ream but persisted in failing to achieve the secure and lucrative post at some grand or, if worse came to worst, petty court that Leopold had spent decades of paternal exertion and will preparing him for. So it had to be Mozart's fault. It had to be that he was discourteous to prospective patrons or too stupid to understand how to butter them up, or too snobbish to compose tunes that would charm the general public—"Let it be short, easy and popular," urged Leopold—or "indolent"! or wickedly having a good time when instead he should be out and around *forcing* people to do what Papa wanted.) Mozart defends himself with pride and energy and conviction, is dignified and hurt but never spiteful or angry; the letter is untypically somber, but, as ever, he signs himself without irony or inappropriateness "your most obedient son." He was twenty-five, and had ten years left to him.

But then Orpheus didn't live long enough to play himself out. "A man is not a genius for nothing," says Turner. "Men of such genius as Mozart's must be conscious of it. It must be an exhilarating element in their lives to a degree of which we can hardly conceive. It may amount, indeed, to what we might call an intoxication of the spirit to which lesser men can only aspire through being in love or in drink." Having been given so much, genius may be tempted to take all. "He was full of fire," recalled a family friend, a Salzburg musician named Schachtner, after Mozart's death: "his inclinations were easily swayed; I believe that had he been without the advantage of the good education which he received [a memorial bow to

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Schachtner's colleague Leopold, also dead] he might have become a profligate scoundrel—he was so ready to yield to every attraction which offered." True, Schachtner might have innocently embroidered this recollection a bit with certain exaggerations from Leopold, who wasn't above explaining to other Salzburgers that, if it hadn't been for his firm fatherly hand, Wolfgang would have turned into the wolf-man of the Vienna woods. Leopold's self-serving imagination had developed a loose tongue and a crying need for reassurance from outsiders, even at the expense of his son's privacy. "When you write to me about something I have done, of which you disapprove or which you think might have been done better," says Mozart in another part of the letter already quoted from, "and in reply I send you my ideas on the subject, please regard the whole matter as one between father and son alone, a secret, I mean, and something which is not to be told to others, as I myself always regard it."

In any case, respectable Leopold had none of the temptations of genius: besides the duties of religion and family, he was an able musician, teacher, and church composer, author of a widely used text on playing the violin, Deputy Kapellmeister at the court of the Archbishop of Salzburg. Nevertheless, as the father of his incredible son he suffered a temptation so awesome and unprecedented, particularly for a man of his training and temperament, that it might as well have issued from the Devil himself.

At the outset he thought of it as an opportunity, heaven-sent. Figure a conscientious musician, settled in a small Austrian cathedral town, a man intelligent and sensitive and ambitious far beyond the talent by means of which he makes his living, on whom gradually and against every rational expectation dawns the discovery that his infant son is possessed of (and by) musical powers so prodigious that the term "prodigy" had better be reserved from now on for children playing "Chopsticks" on toy pianos. "Let me add some remarkable and astonishing facts," continues Schachtner in his reminiscence; and here are some facts he can attest to by having observed them himself. One afternoon he accompanied Leopold to the Mozart home where "we found the four-year-old Wolfgangerl busy with the pen":

> *Father:* "What are you doing?"
> *Wolfg.:* "Writing a concerto for the clavier, the first part is almost done."
> *Father:* "Let me see."
> *Wolfg.:* "It's not quite finished."
> *Father:* "Never mind, let me see it, it must be something very fine."
> [Leopold] . . . took it from him and showed me a daub of notes for the most part written over dried ink-blots. (N.B. The little

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Wolfgangerl dipped his pen every time to the bottom of the inkwell so that a blot fell every time he touched the paper, but that did not disturb him, he rubbed it off with his hand and went on writing.) We laughed at first at this apparent nonsense, but then . . . [Leopold] began to notice the theme, the notes, the composition; his study of the sheet became more intent until at last tears of wonder and delight fell from his eyes.

"Look, Herr Schachtner," he said, "how correct and orderly it is; only it is of no use because it is so very difficult that nobody could play it." Then Wolfgangerl struck in: "That is why it is a concerto, one must practice it until one can do it; look! this is how it goes." He played, but could only bring out enough to show us what he intended. He had then the notion that playing concertos and working miracles were the same thing.

Leopold may have doubted Mozart's moral nature, but from very early he never doubted that his son was the greatest composer who had ever lived: "what a shame if such a genius were to founder!" Having been by proxy given so much Leopold thought he had been authorized to take all, at least vicariously. His daughter and only other surviving child, Nannerl, four and a half years older than Wolfgang, had become under Leopold's instruction an excellent performer on the clavier. "If you will take the trouble," he wrote to Mozart years later, "to remember what I undertook with you two children in your tender youth, you will not accuse me of cowardice [but nobody will anyhow], but will admit, as others do, that I always have been and still am a man who has the courage to dare all." Two weeks before Mozart's sixth birthday, Leopold and his children set off on the first of a series of tours which eventually took Mozart for as long as three and a half years at a stretch through most of western Europe and as far as England, and which occupied much of his time and energy for more than half of his life. "Or should I perhaps sit down in Salzburg," Leopold wrote from Vienna to a friend on May 11, 1768 (Mozart was twelve), "with the empty hope of some better fortune, let Wolfgang grow up . . . until he attains the age and physical appearance which no longer attract admiration for his merits?"

At six or eight or twelve Mozart could hardly be held responsible for anything except his merits, i.e. his ability to dumbfound and ravish the audiences who came to watch and hear him and were "almost struck dead with amazement." "This boy," said a musician having seen and heard him, "is the greatest man now living in the world." When these first tours proved more triumphant than profitable, Leopold didn't blame his son—well, not quite though very nearly—but it should go without saying that he didn't blame himself either. The weather was bad, or it was summer and everybody had gone on vacation, or an epidemic kept the music-lovers locked up in

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terror at home or frightened them into fleeing to their country estates, or a royal personage died and the theaters were closed, or the children were ill, sometimes close to deathly ill. Mozart survived scarlet fever and smallpox, and was often laid up for weeks by respiratory ailments; in his letters to Salzburg Leopold can almost be detected complaining about his bedridden children's inconsiderateness ("Until this trouble started, everything was going swimmingly") and even God's ("Now God has upset my calculations"), but he usually pulls back in time to thank God for survival and other favors—and, over and over like a sad little family refrain, appreciation and praise but no money, from "Princess Amalia, sister of the King of Prussia, . . . but she herself has no money," or Prince Charles of Lorraine who "spends his time hunting, eating and drinking, and in the end it appears that he has no money," or "Her Majesty the Empress was very gracious to us, but that was all," or "this gentleman [the Emperor himself, who] positively abhors everything that might entail any expenditure . . . [and] believes . . . he has paid us by his most gracious conversations." Meanwhile "I shall . . . have a pretty bill to pay at the hotel; and for the journey to Paris I must have at least two hundred gulden in my pocket."

When later Leopold had to remain in Salzburg for fear of losing his job with the Archbishop and Mozart went on tour accompanied by his mother or, after her death, was on his own in Vienna, if anything went wrong the fault was of course not his father's or the weather but entirely his (maybe abetted by his compliant mother while she was still there); and nobody ever found more ways of saying fool and ingrate than know-it-all Leopold unleashing his postal recriminations from back home. "If only you had done what I told you"; "indeed I told you this long ago"; "I never expected anything else"; "I too could have" managed something or other or anything at all as well or better; "everything recoils on your poor old father"; "if you had read my letters carefully, you would have known what to do"; "I knew"; "I foresaw"; "I told"; "I fully realize." (And the self-righteousness grows much meaner and more hysterical as he begins to understand that never never will he find himself seated at the right hand of unchallenged eminence, loving the view.) Nor does Leopold scruple, either, to keep announcing in every other letter that his wife's death while she was on tour with Mozart resulted from Mozart's indifference and his failure to follow the all-purpose home-remedy medical advice that Leopold could always provide to the final spoonful of black powder and dragon's blood: "as she didn't make a fuss, you treated her condition lightly"; and besides "if your mother had returned home from Mannheim, she would not have died. But . . . owing to your new friendship, her return had to be abandoned"; however, during one of these fatherly reminders he is generous enough to concede that the Almighty was equally culpable: "God willed it." While Mamma is still around to

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take her share of the browbeating, Leopold reminds her that she has to see to it that her son gets his mind off music long enough to meet his responsibilities: "Do you think that Wolfgang will now attend to his affairs? I hope he has got accustomed to doing this and that his head is not always full of music." When Mozart says how much he pities a musician he knows who had been mutilated by incompetent surgery, Leopold responds with rare agreement and a reminder that, though he himself has none of his son's defects, he has the same virtues (and doubtless better ones in addition): "I'd have felt exactly the same. You know how tender-hearted I am." Also, believe it or not, "I was young once myself." "Once you have made your father's happiness your first consideration," writes Leopold with crazy blandness, "he will continue to think of your welfare and happiness and to stand by you as a loyal friend." Because Leopold's style is pedantically rigorous in its clarity and correctness almost always, the odd breakdown of meaning in the second half of this sentence—"Once you have made . . . " isn't coherent with "he will continue to . . ."—suggests that by now Leopold might have been for the moment somewhat rattled or abashed by the enormity of what he had invariably demanded which all the same didn't prevent him from continuing to demand it. Mozart was twenty-two, and trying against all odds to make his way in Paris.

"My dearest Papa," writes Mozart from Paris, "I must really beg you once more not to worry so much, not to be so anxious; for now you have no reason to be. I am at last in a place where it is certainly possible to make money, though this requires a frightful amount of effort and work. But I am willing to do anything to please you." (There were some things that, virtually against his nature, he could learn to dislike; yet, though he detests Paris and the French, he is willing to do anything to please Papa: gives time-consuming lessons to the talentless children of aristocrats who don't condescend to pay him, and does his futile best to overcome the French resistance to good music. "I cannot bear Salzburg," he writes a year later, bitterly recalling the stifling provincial town and its hateful Archbishop ("I shit on both," he comes right out with it later—four years older and wiser): the Archbishop Hieronymus Colloredo, one of history's prime slimeballs, the insulting and niggardly employer of father and son, who "acts as a *screen* to keep me from the notice of others" and soon will have Mozart literally kicked out of his employ; but the father's son returns now to Salzburg because his father is there and wants him back. Two years afterward his sister is about to marry, and Mozart, settled in Vienna, tries to arrange with her to move with their father and her husband to Vienna: "Our dear father was the only difficulty [because he "would have to resign his post"], for I wanted him to enjoy his rest and not to have to worry and torment himself"; but Mozart hopes to find work for her husband, and, if Nannerl performs at concerts and teaches, the three of them

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will earn enough for themselves and Papa too. It didn't happen, but Mozart tried. Not only a fond and dutiful son; despite Leopold's zillions of tantrums beginning in his son's infancy, he wasn't able to make a dent in Mozart's disposition. "You make light of everything," he says despairingly to his cheerful son the great composer, having done what he could over the years to make everything dark and deadly.

"The children are merry and behave everywhere as if they were at home," writes Leopold on an early tour. "The boy [six-year-old Wolfgang] is as intimate with everyone . . . as if he had known them all his life." "Wolfgang [at seven] is extraordinarily jolly, but a bit of a scamp." And so on through the years of travel. At thirteen, he writes to Mamma: "My heart is completely enchanted with all these pleasures, because it is so jolly on the journey, because it is so warm in the carriage and because our coachman is a fine fellow who when the road gives him the slightest chance, drives so fast." At fourteen, to Nannerl: "I have no news except that Herr Gellert, the poet, has died at Leipzig and since his death has written no more poetry." Or: "Here I am, now you have me. Dear little Marianne, with all my arse I rejoice that you had such a frightfully good time . . ." (All his life Mozart joked freely about shitting and farting; Nannerl joined in; so did Mamma, who writes in rhyme to Leopold, "Keep well my love. Into your mouth your arse you'll shove. I wish you good-night, my dear, but first shit in your bed and make it burst." Only Leopold doesn't use such language, though he's amused by it: "I am delighted that Mamma is in good form." It probably sounds wittier, or at any rate more playful, in German. The definitive monograph on this German predilection, which so to speak permeates German folklore and colloquial imagery from the Middle Ages to the present, is *Life Is a Chicken Coop Ladder*, by Alan Dundes, Columbia University Press, 1984. It's chock-full of examples, including many from Luther, Mozart, and Goethe. Most of the jokes wouldn't tickle twentieth-century Americans, whose folkloristic interest in "ass" is associated with a different natural function.) At fifteen: "Upstairs we have a violinist, downstairs another one, in the next room a singing-master who gives lessons, and in the other room opposite ours an oboist. That is good fun when you are composing! It gives you plenty of ideas." Nothing could keep him down, this sunny and lively child and youth whose capacity for joy in people and new scenes as well as in his music was inexhaustible, and unimpaired by the company or correspondence of a father whose initial harmless fussiness and self-satisfaction gradually turned into qualities more disagreeable of themselves and less susceptible to being deflected or neutralized.

In 1785 Leopold spent two months as his son's guest in Vienna, where at last he was able to experience something like the vicarious glory he had been planning for and anticipating since twenty or so

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years earlier. Mozart was at the summit of his fame and reputation and productivity: concerts not only frequent and well attended but profitable; many, many masterpieces turned out almost between sleep and waking—e.g. the quartets dedicated to Haydn; eight or nine of the greatest piano concertos ever written; the C minor piano sonata and its companion fantasia. Relations between father and son had cooled: Leopold had carped and raged and belittled and ridiculed for too long, and had scornfully opposed Mozart's marriage (he seems to have thought that Mozart had married beneath himself; perhaps Leopold was recalling too vividly "all-powerful Wolfgang," the wizard child of the first tours, kissed and caressed and dandled by most of the Empresses and Queens and Princesses of Europe). Leopold wrote to Nannerl—now married and living at a distance—that "I have at this moment received ten lines from your brother," who wouldn't bother to sit down and write volumes to his poor old father, and it was no excuse that he chanced to be in a whirl of the busiest creative and performing and teaching and administrative musical activities ever undertaken by a great composer.

Notwithstanding, Leopold had the time of his life, and the sense and taste to recognize it as its value. "The concert was magnificent. . . . We had a new and very fine concerto [K. 466, in D minor] by Wolfgang, which the copyist was still copying when we arrived, and the rondo of which your brother did not even have time to play through, as he had to supervise the copying. . . . On Saturday evening Herr Joseph Haydn . . . came to see us and the new quartets were performed. . . . Haydn said to me: 'Before God and as an honest man I tell you that your son is the greatest composer known to me either in person or by name.' . . . Yesterday . . . there was again a recital. . . . Your brother played his new grand concerto in D minor most magnificently. . . ." Leopold had always told everybody that Mozart had been trapped into marriage by the mother of the bride; but now, invited to Frau Weber's for dinner, he could expansively grant that she was an excellent cook: "I must tell you that the meal, which was neither too lavish nor too stingy, was cooked to perfection." There was so much to do and take in: "We never get to bed before one o'clock and I never get up before nine. We lunch at two or half past. . . . Every day there are concerts; and the whole time is given up to teaching, music, composing, and so forth. I feel rather out of it all." It was glorious but remote, like a dream: too much, too little, and too late.

Soon enough Leopold was back in Salzburg and back to his old tricks: "a letter of twelve lines from your brother. . . . He begs to be forgiven, as he is up to the eyes in work at his opera 'Le Nozze di Figaro.' . . . No doubt according to his charming habit he has let the time slip by." Mozart wanted to bring Constanze with him on a tour of England (where Leopold, Nannerl, and the boy wonder had

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been twenty years earlier) and wrote asking whether they might leave their two children with Leopold; but Leopold wouldn't even entertain the very idea of so gross an imposition: "You can easily imagine," he wrote to Nannerl, "that I had to express myself very emphatically." As a matter of fact, though he wouldn't babysit for Wolfgang, he would and more for Nannerl. Mozart had heard from a family friend that Nannerl's son was living with Leopold: "I had never told your brother. So that is how the brilliant idea occurred to him, or perhaps his wife. Not at all a bad arrangement! They could go off and travel—they might even die—or remain in England—and I should have to run off after them with the children." But it was Leopold who died first, six months later following a brief illness, four and a half years before the death of his son, who never made that second trip to England.

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NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

GEORGE WATSON, who is a Fellow of St. John's College, Cambridge, England, has been a visiting professor of English at New York University, the University of Minnesota and the University of Georgia, and is the author of *Politics & Literature in Modern Britain* (St. Martin's Press) and *The Idea of Liberalism* (St. Martin's Press) . . . . DAVID EHRENFELD is professor of biology at Rutgers University. He has written a number of books including *The Arrogance of Humanism*, an examination of prevailing beliefs about human control over nature, and is co-author, with C. K. Mack, of a science fiction novel, *The Chameleon Variant*, about genetic engineering and its potential use in undercover operations. He is a founder and director of the E. F. Schumacher Society (U.S.). He has been named editor of *Conservation Biology*, the forthcoming journal of the Society for Conservation Biology. Dr. Ehrenfeld lives in Highland Park, N.J. . . DAVID LAVERY* was born in 1949 in Oil City, Pa. He is assistant professor of English at Northern Kentucky University. He was educated at the University of Florida, from which he obtained his Ph.D. in 1978. His essays have appeared in *The Georgia Review*, *Massachusetts Review*, *Parabola*, *Extrapolation*, *Michigan Quarterly Review*, *College English*, and elsewhere. He is at work on a book-length study of the culture of the Space Age, tentatively entitled *Late for the Sky*. He lives in Ft. Thomas, Ky.

CARL DJERASSI* received the National Medal of Science, 1973, for the synthesis of the first oral contraceptive. He is professor of chemistry at Stanford University. His poetry has appeared in the *Cumberland Poetry Review* and other magazines. "Castor's Dilemma," his first published story, is based on a chapter in a novel currently in progress. . . . DANA GIOIA's first collection of poems, *Daily Horoscope*, was recently published by Graywolf Press. . . . JESSICA TREADWAY's first published short story appeared in the Autumn 1984 issue of *The Hudson Review*. A former news reporter for United Press International, she is a native of Albany, New York now living in Boston. . . . DANIEL HOFFMAN, author among other books, of *Poe Poe Poe Poe Poe Poe Poe* and the poem *Brotherly Love*, teaches at the University of Pennsylvania. . . . JENNIFER REGAN* writes TV reviews for *The New York Post* and book reviews for *The Buffalo News*. She is working on a book of short fiction. . . . JOHN HOLLOWAY retired from his Personal Chair in English at Cambridge, U.K. in 1982, after twenty-eight years' teaching in the university. In recent years he has lectured in Finland, Virginia, Hong

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Kong, New Zealand, Fiji, Arizona and Idaho. A new book of poems is now ready, and the *Oxford Book of Local Verses* will be published early next year.

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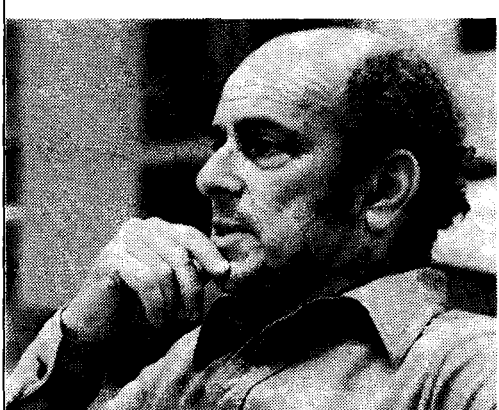

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